Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community

Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text

BY

Angelika Neuwirth

SCRIPTURE, POETRY AND THE MAKING OF A COMMUNITY

This volume presents the views on the Qur'an by Professor Angelika Neuwirth, one of the leading scholars in Qur'anic studies today. It contains fourteen articles that reflect her original thought on the topic as developed over thirty years of research. The book consists of a mixture of new as well as previously published pieces, some of which are translations from the German while others are articles originally written in English. Thus, for the first time, Prof. Neuwirth's scholarship on the Qur'an is presented to a global audience in English in a comprehensive way.

In Prof. Neuwirth's view, scholars are used to understanding the Qur'an as the 'Islamic text' par excellence, an assumption which, when viewed historically, is far from evident. More than twenty years before it rose to the rank of Islamic scripture, the Qur'an was an oral proclamation addressed by the Prophet Muhammad to pre-Islamic listeners, for the Muslim community had not yet been formed. Those listeners might best be described as individuals educated in late antique culture, be they Arab pagans familiar with the monotheistic religions of Judaism and Christianity, or syncretists of these religions, or learned Jews and Christians whose presence is reflected in the Medinan suras. The interactive communication process between Muhammad and these groups brought about an epistemic turn in Arab Late Antiquity: with the Qur'anic discovery of writing as the ultimate authority, the nascent community attained a new 'textual coherence' where scripture, with its valorisation of history and memory, was recognised as a guiding concept. It is within this new Biblically imprinted world view that central principles and values of the pagan Arab milieu were debated. This process resulted in a twin achievement: the genesis of a new scripture and the emergence of a community.

Two great traditions, then, the Biblical, transmitted by both Jews and Christians, and the local Arabic, represented in Ancient Arabic poetry, appear to have established the field of tension from which the Qur'an evolved; it was both scripture and poetry which had produced and shaped the emerging Muslim community.

ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH was educated in Classics and Oriental Studies at German and international universities (Italy, Iran and Israel). She has taught at the universities of Munich, Amman, Bamberg and Cairo, and has held the Chair of Arabic Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin since 1991. From 1994 to 1999 she served as the director of the Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft in Beirut and Istanbul. Her major fields of research are classical and modern Arabic literature and Arab Late Antiquity studies. In several recent publications, she has tried to vindicate the Qur'an as a Late Antique text, which – though deeply rooted in Arab culture – has contributed creatively to a number of major theological discourses. Angelika Neuwirth has been acknowledged for her novel approach to interreligious studies by being bestowed several honorary doctorates, academy memberships and professional awards.

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THE QUR'AN has been an inexhaustible source of intellectual and spiritual reflection in Islamic history, giving rise to ever-proliferating commentaries and interpretations. Many of these have remained a realm for specialists due to their scholarly demands. Others, more widely read, remain untranslated from the primary language of their composition. This series aims to make some of these materials from a broad chronological range – the formative centuries of Islam to the present day – available to a wider readership through translation and publication in English, accompanied where necessary by introductory or explanatory materials. The series will also include contextual-analytical and survey studies of these primary materials.

Throughout this series and others like it which may appear in the future, the aim is to allow the materials to speak for themselves. Not surprisingly, in the Muslim world where its scriptural sources continue to command passionate interest and commitment, the Qur'an has been subject to contending, often antithetical ideas and interpretations. The series takes no sides in these debates. The aim rather is to place on the record the rich diversity and plurality of approaches and opinions which have appealed to the Qur'an throughout history (and even more so today). The breadth of this range, however partisan or controversial individual presentations within it may be, is instructive in itself. While there is always room in such matters for personal preferences, commitment to particular traditions of belief, and scholarly evaluations, much is to be gained by a simple appreciation, not always evident today, of the enormous wealth of intellectual effort that has been devoted to the Qur'an from the earliest times. It is hoped that through this objective, this series will prove of use to scholars and students in Qur'anic Studies as well as other allied and relevant fields.

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* Revised version of a translation by Gwendolin Goldbloom

** Revised version of a translation by W. Scott Chahanovich

To my sons, with love and gratitude for their dedication and perdurance,
and to the fathers
Theophanes Chasapakis, Archbishop of Gerasa, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem;
Aristarchos Peristeris, Archbishop of Konstantine, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem;
Laurentius Klein, Dean of Theological Studies at the Dormition Abbey, Jerusalem
and the gracious teachers
Yasin al-Bakri, Imam al-Masjid al-Aqsa, Jerusalem;
and Eliezer Benno, Mizrahi community, Jerusalem
who introduced me into the language of liturgy in the heart of its birthplace, with reverence

Note on Transliteration, Conventions and Abbreviations

Arabic transliterations follow a modified system based on the standard of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Names, terms and toponyms from non-Latin alphabets are transliterated unless common to English. The genealogical sequence Muḥammad ibn Qāsim, etc., is abbreviated with 'b.' for ibn (son) and 'bt.' for bint (daughter); the definite article on the *nisba* and the *laqab* is generally dropped after its first appearance, that is, from 'al-Khargūshī' to 'Khargūshī' or 'al-Jāḥiẓ' to 'Jāḥiẓ', and so forth. Definite articles, however, are by and large maintained for formal titles, that is, al-Ḥākim. Dates pertaining to Islamic history are indicated both in *hijrī* and Common Era forms. Unless otherwise indicated, all Qur'anic translations are Arthur Arberry's, taken from the Qur'anic Arabic Corpus website (http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp). Any deviations from Arberry's translation appear in square brackets. All Biblical quotations were taken from the King James Bible Online (http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org).

Abbreviations

*EI*² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed., P. Bearman *et al.*, 2nd edition. Leiden, Brill, 1960–2009

EQ *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed., Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Leiden, Brill, 2001–2006

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my deep thanks to the Institute of Ismaili Studies for generously offering me the unique chance to republish in a revised form a number of articles on the Qur'an, thus allowing me to make available to an English-speaking audience several articles that had been accessible only in German, and to bring to light several others that had been 'hidden' within interdisciplinary collective works. The articles appearing in this volume date from 1990 to 2012, a period when many new discoveries were made and novel scholarship further elaborated upon, and often corrected, earlier views of the Qur'an.[1] As the most significant breakthrough in contemporary scholarship, the new approach to the Qur'an as a late antique text deserves to be emphasised.

Yet, one is left with the impression that somehow the wrong questions are still being asked, or even that a rationalistic and positivistic historicism still prevails which induces scholars to focus on external sources rather than on the literary artefact of the Qur'anic text itself. The almost ubiquitous rash dismissal of the Qur'an's original orality, and of its gradual emergence and development out of an interactive process of communication between a proclaimer and his listeners, a process rooted in late antique history, turns the Qur'an into a volatile, indeterminable text. It threatens to hamper Western scholars in their essential task of presenting the scripture of Islam as a text not simply nourished by their own Jewish/Christian theological tradition, but actually a vital part of it, an active player in the formation of the three religious traditions. An important observation made by the Biblical scholar James Kugel has still to be made fruitful for the Qur'an. Kugel observes that there was a momentous shift in the perception of the Bible roughly around the period of Late Antiquity. During this time, the Bible underwent a process of popularisation. It changed from a corpus of texts reserved for particular elites into a scripture, into texts accessible to ordinary readers, fit to serve as the basis of the pious practices of a large and socially diverse community, and to occupy the focus of their theological debate. The changed concept of scripture generated a new, living tradition that pervaded all realms of life. Kugel claims that what spurred this development was a fresh way of reading scripture in light of the Biblical wisdom texts rather than any change in the texts themselves:

> One would not be wrong to think of this transformation as, in effect, a kind of massive act of rewriting. The raw material that made up the Bible was

> written anew not by changing its words but by changing the way in which those words were approached and understood ... [There are] two very different sets of documents, the biblical texts in their original settings and meanings and what those texts were later made out to mean by Jewish and Christian authorities.[2]

One might wonder, however, why this momentous 'rewriting' of the Bible is thought to have been undertaken only by Jewish and Christian authorities? Why not also by Muslims? The claim raised in this volume is that there was a third wave of review of Biblical tradition that generated an equally new, living religious tradition and a new, canonical scripture. It is manifest in the Qur'an in spite of the fact that it was not the identical words of the written Bible, but the orally transmitted Biblical lore that constituted the bedrock of the emergent Qur'anic tradition. Undeniably, a comparably momentous re-reading of the Bible did take place with the emergence of the Qur'an as well. The Qur'an, therefore, deserves to be re-contextualised with this insight in mind and, ultimately, to be put on an equal footing with the two earlier readings of the Bible, which have never been denied their due scholarly attention.

Although many of the articles presented here were written before the programmatic re-localisation of the Qur'an in Late Antiquity, they attest to just such an inclusive understanding of the Qur'an.[3] Most of the earlier articles have, additionally, been thoroughly revised in light of the recent developments and the weighty desiderata that still obtain for Qur'anic scholarship. The particular hermeneutic underlying them has been made more perspicuous not least by flanking them with a number of more recent articles.

Confronted with this task of revision, it came as a favourable coincidence that, in preparing the second volume of the Concise Commentary on the Qur'an,[4] I was to re-read a number of middle Meccan suras in class. Particularly, discussions at Berlin seminars held with Joseph Witztum (Jerusalem), Samer Rashwani (Aleppo), Mehrdad Abbasi (Tehran), Esra Gözeler (Ankara), Issam Eido (Damascus);[5] as well as with Nora Katharina Schmid, Hannelies Koloska, David Kiltz, Yosef Khouriyhe, Ghassan El Masri;[6] and Dirk Hartwig were extremely stimulating. Debates with the two supervisors of the Corpus Coranicum project, Michael Marx and Nicolai Sinai, are also remembered with gratitude. What, furthermore, proved particularly helpful in rethinking the older texts presented here was a fresh discussion of their topics with a number of most inquisitive and critical American postgraduate students, an opportunity made possible to me through a Carnegie Mellon guest professorship during the fall of 2012 at the University of Chicago. I am most grateful to my Chicago colleagues and friends for

inspiring talks, in particular to Michael Sells, Fred Donner, Tahera Qutbuddin, Ahmad Shamsi, Muzaffar Alam, David Nirenberg, Farouk Abdel Wahab, Orit Bashkin, Margaret Mitchell and, last but not least, Michael Fishbane. My stay was further enhanced by the discussion of my theses with colleagues from neighbouring universities equally engaged in late antique studies: Gabriel Said Reynolds (University of Notre Dame), Antoine Borrut (University of Maryland), and Karla Malette and Alexander Knysh (University of Michigan). I also benefitted greatly from a workshop, 'Qur'anic Studies Today', that I was invited to convene in Chicago, which initiated a closer contact with a larger number of North American colleagues and opened my eyes to local methodological developments that had appeared less perspicuous when looked upon from afar. My host institution, the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, proved highly inspiring, alerting me to important new theological approaches that had not yet been applied to the Qur'an; some of the revised articles have benefitted from the social memory discourse,[7] others from path-breaking New Testament studies by John Dunne and Margaret Mitchell,[8] to name a few. Additionally, annual discussions with colleagues and students of theology in the teaching programme at the Dormition Abbey (Jerusalem) have been a continuous source of inspiration; in particular, a joint Christian–Muslim theological seminar, 'Images of the Virgin Mary', held in January 2013, directed by the dean of the Theological Studies Programme at the Dormition Abbey, Sr Margareta Gruber, substantially expanded my horizons and opened my eyes to earlier neglected essentials. Finally, a more recent lecture tour to the University of California Santa Barbara and the University of California Los Angeles provided me with the opportunity to debate the relationship between the Qur'an and Late Antiquity with a group of spirited specialists in early Islamic history and Arabic literature; I gratefully remember discussions with Dwight Reynolds, Stephen Humphreys and Michael Cooperson, and their promising postgraduate students.

The project of revisiting and republishing this heterogeneous outcome of a lengthy process of learning in varying scholarly contexts would not have been realised, however, without the support of the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Without the proficiency and dedication of their translators and editors, in particular Lisa Morgan, the indispensible task of reworking the older texts and turning their Teutonic diction into a readable language would not have been carried out. I am grateful for the enduring patience and the immense support I was granted by my partners at the Institute, not least by the inventor of the idea of this volume, Omar Alí-de-Unzaga.

Many of the articles assembled in this volume were originally composed during my subsequent stays in Jerusalem where I was hosted and cared for by

my sons. Without their hope-inspiring presence and their continuous kindness in facilitating my frequent shuttling between the textual world and the real world, many of these articles would not have been written. I remember the days and hours spent in their company with deep gratitude. I was furthermore privileged to live and work in the Old City where the language of liturgy is always audible in various tongues. I owe a great deal of my motivation and enthusiasm to the pious of Jerusalem, the adherents of diverse denominations, whose reading practices made me alert to the multiple meanings and the breadth of the life of scriptural texts.

NOTES

1 The enormous progress achieved in Qur'anic scholarship during the last few decades can be evinced from the following volume of collected works: Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx, eds., *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden, 2009).

2 James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York, 2007), pp. 671–2.

3 The project of this type of inclusive reading of the Qur'an has been programmatically laid out in Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin, 2010). An English version of this is being prepared for publication with Oxford University Press. It was compiled as a general preview of a more comprehensive research initiative, the Corpus Coranicum project, which was established in 2007 at the Berlin Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. The early results of this project are available online at http://www.corpuscoranicum.de. For more information, see Michael Marx, 'Ein Koranforschungsprojekt in der Tradition der Wissenschaft des Judentums: Zur Programmatik des Akademienvorhabens Corpus Coranicum', in Dirk Hartwig *et al.*, eds., *'Im vollen Licht der Geschichte': Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung* (Würzburg, 2008), pp. 41–54.

4 Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. II, *Mittelmekkanische Suren* (Berlin, forthcoming). The first volume has appeared as eadem, *Der Koran*, vol. I, *Frühmekkanische Suren* (Berlin, 2011).

5 Two fellows (2011/2012) of the 'Europe in the Middle East, the Middle East in Europe (EUME)' programme at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and two Humboldt fellows hosted by EUME.

6 Researchers for the Corpus Coranicum project.

7 See Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (Atlanta, GA, 2005).

8 John D.G. Dunne, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London, 1991); Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge, 2010).

Introduction

Epistemic Pessimism in Qur'anic Studies?

There could be, at first glance, many reasons to view the present state of Qur'anic studies with optimism: the sheer number of scholars and institutions concerned with the Qur'an worldwide is unprecedented. Yet, a sort of pessimism hovers over Qur'anic studies – no despair about the future of the thriving discipline, but what may be called 'epistemic pessimism'. Not only are there vast corpora of Islamic learning that are rashly dismissed by a majority of scholars as useless for Qur'anic studies,[1] such as the *sīra* (the biography of the Prophet) and often Islamic tradition as a whole, but equally there seems to be little interest in the pagan Arab background of the Qur'anic event. Thus, a number of texts and traditions are excluded from the scope of Qur'anic scholarship for the sake of a principal decision: to relocate the Qur'an out of Arabia into an indeterminate Christian space and to reinterpret it not as the transcript of a prophetical communication, but as an anonymous compilation more or less completely dissociated from the historical event of the ministry of Muhammad.

What has moved into the centre of interest is the relationship between the Qur'an and Christian tradition. Western scholarship, whose most valuable works had concentrated on the Qur'an as a literary artefact, has more recently come to focus on the alleged Christian subtexts,[2] often understood as 'sources' of the Qur'an.[3] A momentous hermeneutic shift has thus occurred. It is true that there is a close relationship between the Qur'an and Biblical tradition. Modern scholars are thus confronted with two, more or less, thematically equivalent text traditions – the Biblical, often Christian-imprinted, and the Qur'anic. They thus have to decide on their approach; are they going to explore the Qur'an as a document of the emerging identity of a new community or are they going to explore the Qur'an as a material source for the early Arabic reception of Christian tradition? When faced with this alternative, a representative group of Western Qur'anic scholars opt to privilege their own Christian heritage, viewing the Qur'an as a text subsidiary to the Bible rather than as an original scripture in its own right.[4] This is in keeping with an almost axiomatic view, often encountered among the Western public in general, that the Bible holds the status of a charter of truth – reserved, however, for its privileged addressees, previously the Christians exclusively,[5] more recently for both the Jews and the Christians. This status, in turn, confers a

certain cachet upon the Christians and the Jews, thus providing them with a cultural and even civilisational pedigree that is denied to the 'non-Biblical' Muslims.

This favouring of the Christian tradition is no academic trifle. 'Preference' is a basic principle of hermeneutics. As Peter Heath has stressed, 'Privileging texts is a social decision. It is societies that determine textual hierarchies [and this applies to scholarly communities as well]. And radical changes in privileging provoke comprehensive hierarchical restructurings.'[6] Due to the recent privileging of Christian subtexts,[7] the Qur'an is now being read as a sort of Christian apocryphal work. With few exceptions, scholars no longer bother about its literary form, which in philological scholarship would require decoding according to the methods of literary criticism. Instead, the text is immediately broken down into haphazard textual pieces that only need to be screened for their Christian essence. Essential steps of philology have been discarded, thus clearing the way for speculations built on the assumption that the Qur'an only emerged from an anonymous redaction process whose precise epistemic milieu can no longer be determined. Such a decision sets the course for investigating the text as a historical document and no longer as a literary artefact.

The work presented here, conversely, strives to study the literary character of the Qur'an in a rigorous manner. It therefore confronts the essential questions about the literary genre of the Qur'an. Do its form and structure really permit us to view it as a premeditated compilation of diverse, previously circulating traditions carried out by an unknown author (or authors)? Or, rather, does it fit with the model established in Islamic tradition where the Qur'an appears as the transcript of the ritual process of a communication – a sort of drama enacted between the Prophet and his audience – that enabled the pagans and syncretists (i.e. confessionally non-defined monotheists) listening to the Prophet to transform into a monotheistic community in their own right?[8] This latter question has seldom been explicitly raised and examined; most European and North American scholars have simply tacitly opted for the first possibility. Thus the Qur'an, to some scholars, appears as an anthology of 114 unconnected units (suras), a textual fait accompli imagined to have been the composition of a single, autonomous author.[9] As a rule, however, scholars go a step further by dismissing the study of the unit of the sura altogether and looking at the Qur'an as a textual continuum best explained as the compilation of an unknown group of redactors. They thus tend to regard the text as having been more or less preconceived – a *post eventum*, or even *sine eventu*, report. The decision to subscribe to one of these two positions – to read the Qur'an as a premeditated text or to read it as a

'drama' – is tantamount to setting a specific hermeneutical course. In contrast to a written, pre-meditated, auctorial text, a drama, which involves multiple and changing voices, demands a sequential (i.e. a diachronic) reading, for the individual scenes and acts build upon each other, the later ones being in dialogue with the earlier ones. Thus, in this hermeneutical framework, the intratextuality between the earlier suras and the later ones must be examined in addition to the intertextuality existing between the Qur'an and Biblical tradition.[10] Reading the Qur'an diachronically as an open-ended drama may appear to be an arduous and painstaking task since it requires the reconstruction – at least in heuristic terms – of a chronology of individual utterances, a procedure which admittedly bears the risk of indulging in circular arguments.[11] However, since there is no alternative way of evincing positive evidence of a theological development from the text itself, this task has to be shouldered. Qur'anic studies with the ambition of finally equalling Biblical studies methodologically are dependent on this work of basic research (*Grundlagenforschung*), which has been unduly delayed.[12]

Understanding the Qur'an as a Late Antique Text

It is often ignored that those who first listened to the Qur'an were not Muslims yet; their Muslim identity only emerged in the course of their 'Qur'anic education', their listening to and debating the prophetic proclamation. During the period of this process, they are best described as educated individuals familiar with late antique traditions. 'Late Antiquity', it must be admitted, is a contested concept. Though allowing for an understanding in the sense of a historical epoch (whose delimitation, however, is controversial among historians), it is, in our context, not politically determined.[13] Rather, the term is used to denote an epistemic space where particular textual practices were developed to induce a new understanding of the diverse heritages (or the diverse 'antiquities', so to say). Among the multiple heritages constantly discussed and reinterpreted in the Qur'anic milieu were both the Biblical traditions that had been revisited for several centuries by Jewish and Christian exegetes alike and pre-Islamic Arabian lore documented in ancient Arabic poetry. New readings of older traditions in the Arabic language did not exclusively originate with the Qur'an but had several precedents, not least in pre-Islamic poetry, such as in the poems of al-Aʿshā, ʿAdī b. Zayd or Umayya b. Abī'l-Ṣalt.[14] *Jāhiliyya*, the pre-Islamic culture, should therefore not be viewed – as it often is – as the essential *other* (the opposite) of Islam but, rather, as a vast space of debate involving diverse cultures, a space out of which the Qur'an as well as other types of early Arabic literature emerged.[15] Typically, late

antique re-readings interpreted earlier texts and traditions according to novel ethical terms in compliance with the new tenet of 'care of the self' (*epimeleia heautou*), a concept that originated in late antique philosophy. This tenet – foregrounded by Guy Stroumsa as having been a major driver of innovation in Late Antiquity[16] – encouraged the perception of the soul and the body as inseparable constituents of the individual. This new perception allowed for more inclusive psychic and, thus also, emotional, expressions in poetry, thereby placing the realm of the 'other' – the female, the aged and even the dead – for the first time on an equal footing with the masculine sphere, which earlier on had been the natural vantage point of the poet. Even the animal 'other' was occasionally given a voice in the newly widened mental space described by the poets.[17] Such an extension of scope has been highlighted in a number of important studies on ancient Arabic poetry,[18] without, however, having been related to the wider context of late antique thought, let alone to the evidence of such thinking in the Qur'an, where the care of parents and dependent individuals is encouraged and the status of women is paid new attention.[19]

Due to a host of new textual and material findings, we have more recently gained new insights into the general knowledge and cultural practices of the first/seventh century.[20] We can no longer sustain the image of the Hijaz as a culturally barren region that was propelled into an age of cultural florescence only with the advent of Islam; on the contrary, we must assume that an extensive transfer of knowledge had already taken place and that a broad scope of not only local but also Biblical and post-Biblical traditions was familiar to Muhammad's audience. These, however, were in no way immediately adopted by them but rather negotiated at length – the Qur'an reflects a most rigorous sifting, revision and ultimately supersession of basic Jewish and Christian traditions. To fully understand the achievement of the Qur'an – not only in religious terms but in the broader perspective of intellectual world history and the history of knowledge – we must not ignore the significant process of cultural translation that took place in the Qur'an.

The instrument of this cultural translation was rhetoric. It is in this respect that the Qur'an shares decisive characteristics with core texts of its late antique milieu. To start with the Talmud, which is roughly contemporaneous though hardly related to the Qur'an genetically, there are distinctive traits that both corpora have in common – as seen, for instance, not only in their dialogical structure but in the striking use of a medley of different literary genres in the same narrow context to evoke always changing reactions in the listeners.[21] One might think here of the exuberant-sounding introductory oath clusters, characteristic of the early suras, that are followed by sober, objective statements

about the human condition.[22] This juxtaposition of contrasting forms and ideas in the early Qur'anic texts, as in the Talmud, obviously was meant to have a discomfiting effect. What is further noteworthy is the peculiar combination of textual extracts from different heritage traditions: not unlike the Midrashic contextualisations of Biblical texts from different Biblical corpora, the Qur'anic suras combine almost verbatim quotations from Arabic poetry with summaries from prominent Biblical prophetical texts (such as can be seen in *Sūrat al-Balad*, Q. 90, for example). Heritage ('antiquity') in the Qur'anic case is less homogeneous than in the Rabbinic case; it is at least twofold, comprising both the pagan Arab and the Biblical or post-Biblical heritage. It is no surprise, then, that an unmistakably forensic dimension has been discovered in the Qur'an.[23] The individual suras widely consist of debates interspersed with questions and answers, caveats, retractions and concessions – all pointing to a lively negotiation of current traditions. The Qur'an, judged upon its literary appearance, presents itself (in addition to its character as a mantic manifestation) as the transcript of an ongoing debate of the theological problems that were present in Late Antiquity.[24]

Already, the Qur'an's rhetoric and conceptual lexicon should suffice to prove that the Qur'an did not simply – as Peter Brown claims for early Islamic culture per se[25] – develop 'under the umbrella' of late antique Christian culture, merely slipping on the guise of Christian models. Far from being only a contemporaneous phenomenon, the Qur'an in many respects featured as an active and creative player in the culture of Late Antiquity, first and foremost in the theological realm. Within its Arabian homeland, the Qur'an triggered the new activity of theoretical reflection as it initiated the newly cherished cultural practice of writing.[26] However, its innovative power goes beyond that. One has to remember that the Qur'an was not just in conversation with earlier traditions, but submitted these traditions to a new authoritative tool: that of writing. The new centrality of the word of God, propelled by the Qur'an, was warranted by the image of a divine writing. Writing (and thus language) according to the Qur'an was there before creation; indeed, creation according to the Qur'an obeys linguistic rules – a theological breakthrough that transcends local Arabian dimensions of relevance. It is tantamount to a challenge of the Christian logos theology, which, in the Qur'an, is countered by a new hypostasis of the word, the hypostasis of language. This understanding is lucidly exemplified in Qur'anic texts which establish a basic parallel: as language lends itself to the expression of parity, adopting morphological means such as the dual (*ṣīghat al-muthannā*), to express symmetry, so also does creation which itself becomes symmetrical; language is, thus, not the mirror image of, but the mould, the model, for creation. This priority given to

the epistemic over the material bears ethical implications since the parallel can be extended further: as the microcosm of the human body is symmetrical, the macrocosm of the city (*al-balad*), of the body politic, must become so as well. It needs to be shaped as a harmonious, ethically informed world, where the man-centred, heroic ideals of the *jāhiliyya* have been substituted by the principle of charity (*raḥma*). This new theology is argued through reference to language and its intrinsic logic, verifiable in creation. There was a vivid image in the Qur'an of the Ideal City – the City of God – long before al-Fārābī's famous reworking of Plato's *Politeia*.[27]

Reading the Qur'an Diachronically

The chapters presented here entail samples of a diachronic reading. They focus on the Qur'an as a literary text whose individual units, the suras, are understood as compositions intended as such to serve as the medium through which a particular new message could be conveyed.[28] These texts in their final forms express the consensus of the community achieved in the course of their repeated recitation during the Prophet's ministry (entailed by the ritual process of communication referred to earlier). We may therefore consider them as mirrors of a 'canonisation from below',[29] a process of the successive elevation of the proclamation to the status of a canon without a political authority being involved. That this consensus about the message of the individual suras was all the time subject to communal rethinking is evident from the textual phenomenon of the later additions made to the earlier suras in order to update them, that is, to align them with successively acquired new theological insights of the community.[30] Such revisions of earlier texts, which had from early on been acknowledged as such in learned Islamic tradition,[31] deserve, as Nicolai Sinai has stressed, to be contextualised within the related phenomenon of the Targum in Jewish tradition.[32] The Targumim (pl.) were interpretative translations of Biblical pericopes that were undertaken to make the 'antique' Bible readings delivered in the synagogue service relevant to the members of the community who were acculturated at a later stage of development, in Late Antiquity.[33] A similar process of 'targumisation' undertaken in the Qur'anic case with the earlier suras, however, was not a later intervention but occurred during the proclamation process itself. It is obvious, then, that the message of the Qur'an was being shaped at the very same time that the Muslim community was becoming defined; indeed, it was instrumental in building the community. The Qur'anic communication process thus resulted in two substantial achievements: the emergence of a scripture and the establishment of a community. It is in view of this amazing twin birth, which

the chapters in this volume try to document, that the title 'Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community' was chosen for this collection, 'poetry' here relating both to the corpus of late antique Arabic literature that had been re-read and negotiated in the Qur'an and to the stylistic quality of the new, emerging scripture itself. The volume serves to demonstrate that any investigation of the Qur'anic text which does not acknowledge the synergy that existed between the proclaimer and his audience, who shared a deep interest in diverse sacred and profane traditions, fails to do full justice to the text. The Qur'an mirrors the innumerable discussions and negotiations that took place within the early community, whereby earlier traditions were reviewed in light of their compatibility with the emergent, strictly monotheist theology of what was to become Islam. This process would have necessarily involved those who were listening to Muhammad's message raising individual issues for discussion based on what they had heard. The Qur'anic text itself occasionally makes this process of interaction and review explicit.[34]

Often, but not exclusively, late antique re-readings used transmitted secular knowledge to aid the novel project of religious education; the Qur'an still needs to be assessed within the context of this ubiquitous discursive activity, which both preceded it and was contemporary to it. These processes of continuous rethinking and remodelling of current discourses are formally reflected in the newly prominent feature of the Qur'an – its self-referentiality, the frequent comments in the emerging text about itself. The Qur'an's self-referentiality even seems to have involved theoretical reflections about its own hermeneutical quality.[35] The essential characteristics of late antique re-readings are the textual negotiations manifested in debates, dialogues and question-and-answer patterns of speech, all of which are encountered in the Qur'an. There is, then, full justification for the claim that it was in the field of textual politics that the Qur'anic community most strikingly shared particular late antique structures of thinking with the communities around them. Here, a complex entanglement of Jewish/Christian/Jāhilī/(proto-) Muslim hermeneutical techniques comes to the fore once such textual strategies as techniques of persuasion, the re-coining of pagan concepts in Biblical terms, the typological re-readings of earlier narratives and 'targumisation', are taken into consideration. Until now, however, there has been no systematic attempt to compare the textual strategies applied in the Qur'an with those applied in Greek or Syriac ecclesiastical literature, Rabbinic texts or in *jāhilī qaṣīda*s (standard long poems). There is no study on the Qur'an equivalent to Daniel Boyarin's careful distillations of the hermeneutical techniques shared by Jewish and early Christian texts,[36] although Qur'anic similarities to the neighbouring exegetical traditions are blatant.[37] Though

such techniques have been uncovered, as documented in several of the studies presented in this volume,[38] their systematic contextualisation with older models is still a desideratum.

Dangerous Associations between Christian and Qur'anic Traditions

As mentioned in the beginning, there is a danger in current scholarship of associating the Qur'an too closely with the Christian tradition that surrounded it. Since such traditions reappeared as powerful narratives soon after the emergence of the Qur'an and exerted a strong influence on Umayyad culture, the Qur'an's idiosyncrasy – its own reformulation of prevailing ways of thinking – is easily overlooked or cautiously excluded from scholarly analyses, even in such seminal works as Thomas Sizgorich's 2009 monograph, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*.[39] The author justly laments that, in spite of the emergence of important investigations of early Islam and its late antique milieu, 'until the present no truly synthetic study of the early Islamic community as part of the "late antique oikoumene" [i.e. the entirety of cultures interacting in a shared epistemic space] has appeared'.[40] Sizgorich compares early Islamic attitudes towards violence with contemporary Christian attitudes, relying on the principle that 'the relations of individuals and communities with other individuals and communities may be deeply affected by the character of the narratives within which they understand themselves to be emplotted'.[41] However, by entering the field at the stage of early Islam, he has overleapt the formative period in which the Qur'anic narratives were emerging. This leads Sizgorich to hypothesise that not only did 'many Christian communities . . . seem to have read contemporary events through a narrative of persecution and survival',[42] but that the 'Muslims of the first three centuries after the Hijra, the community's emigration from Mecca to Medina, drew upon the same semiotic koiné they shared with the communities around them to cast certain crucial events . . . as episodes within a specifically Muslim narrative'.[43] Yet, this diagnosis does not hold true for the Qur'an, as a recent study has shown,[44] for a much more complex process of forming a new communal identity can be observed in the Qur'an. Although there is little doubt that the ideology described by Sizgorich prevailed in later periods, the Qur'anic scenario was essentially different. The earliest community can be shown to have only very reluctantly adopted a memory of persecution. The Qur'anic debate about violence in war – wherever such ideas are expounded – remains simultaneously committed to pre-Islamic Arab ideals related to fighting as a heroic act, on the one hand, and less vigorous Biblical models on the other. Qur'anic attitudes towards inflicting and

suffering from violence build heavily upon the typological relationship of the earliest community with that of the Israelites' Book of Exodus, thus clinging to a paradigm which gravitates towards salvation and election as God's chosen people rather than persecution. It is this (at least) double-edged exodus narrative that underlies much of the Qur'anic discourse, though it is only one of several formative narratives.

All in all, if one understands Late Antiquity not primarily as a chronological and politically determined framework in which particular developments occurred but as an epistemic space where ideological developments in the individual communities or societal strata mutually shaped each other, then the proto-Islamic theological concepts and techniques of persuasion in the Qur'an which become apparent from a literary reading will prove of utmost relevance in future research. They open our eyes to two different forms of exchange: on the one hand, those that occurred between the early community and the individual pagan, syncretistic and established religious communities in the period of the Prophet's ministry, and, on the other hand, those that prevailed in the subsequent period where the *grosso modo* myth-critical theology presented by the Prophet became blurred and glossed over by entirely new readings of Biblical paradigms. This distinction, which is seldom made, is indispensible for specifying the mutually influential relationship between Christianity and the emerging Islam in the formative period, a relationship which is often overstated as a one-sided exertion of influence.

To study the Qur'an as a late antique text, however, not only demands such re-contextualisation of the text with the other traditions of its milieu, but ultimately requires us to acknowledge the gradual transformation of the Qur'an from its initial liturgical manifestation as a recitation (*qur'ān*) to a heterogeneous group of listeners into scripture (*kitāb*) – via its penetration of the Biblical space of the Israelites by a nascent community – and finally into a medium of divine empowerment enabling mankind in general to decode the world according to the signs (*āyāt*) displayed in the text.[45] Research that intends to pay tribute to the Qur'an's theological status cannot dismiss this latter epistemic dimension which was intrinsic in the text even from the beginning, though it is only occasionally made explicit in the early suras, for example, in Q. 55:1–4.[46] This theological view of the Qur'an – that it is a text sent from the Divine for the purpose of enabling humankind 'to make sense of the world' by reading it as a sign system – imbues the Qur'an with the same significance and reverence that was attached to the *Memra* (logos) by early Jewish theology and to Sophia ('wisdom') by early Christian theology.[47] Though there is no notion of incarnation in the Qur'an, one might nevertheless speak of a Qur'anic analogon: the word of God linguistically and acoustically

'embodied' in the Qur'an. The concept of the *qur'ān* as the new hypostasis of God's wisdom was a central one in the emerging worldview of the community. One has to reckon with this dimension in particular when venturing into a comparison between the narratives in the Bible and these same Biblical narratives within the Qur'an. Whereas the protagonists of Biblical narratives in their Christian retellings are often charged with a soteriological dimension, that is, they are introduced to mark a progression in salvation history, such significance is denied to them in the Qur'an. It is, rather, transferred to the Qur'an itself, where the event of the Prophet's inspiration is the crucial fact of salvation history. This complex problem has only occasionally been touched upon in this volume,[48] and deserves a more systematic investigation.

Section I: Pagan and Monotheistic Frameworks

The chapters in this volume have been arranged into three sections: a general introductory section, titled 'Pagan and Monotheistic Frameworks', which presents historical and theological prolegomena to Qur'anic scholarship; a core section on the liturgical forms and enactments connected with the Qur'anic texts, titled 'The Liturgical Qur'an and the Emergence of the Community'; and a concluding section, titled 'Narrative Figures between the Bible and the Qur'an', which problematises the relation of the Qur'an to the Bible.

The first section starts with a chapter entitled '*Neither of the East nor of the West* (*lā sharqiyya wa lā gharbiyya*, Q. 24:35): Locating the Qur'an within the History of Scholarship', that is concerned with the history of Qur'anic studies in the West. It is based on a comprehensive research report, first written in German in 2007, that has been updated to include more recent scholarship. This chapter deals with the contentious issue of the Qur'an's 'historicity' – that is, whether the Qur'an emerged roughly according to the Islamic narrative as expounded in the *sīra* (i.e. the Prophetic vita) or, as more sceptical scholars uphold, from an anonymous compilation of earlier traditions. This issue is examined from a new angle, based not on historical or source specific evidence but on the literary evidence of the Qur'an itself.[49] As this first chapter shows, Western scholarship has paid little attention to the Arab environment of the Qur'an. This desideratum is taken up in an article (which will appear in a separate volume) that specifically examines the relationship between the *jāhilī* culture and the Qur'an.[50] Thanks to more recent archaeological findings, particularly epigraphic material, this era has become considerably more transparent to us today. It is, however, noteworthy that these findings only enhance the conclusion that the appearance of the Qur'an cannot be fully

explained from an analysis of its historical setting. Instead, they indicate that the Qur'an's emergence constituted an unexpected leap in development, so new and so comprehensive that it constituted a genuine cultural shift.

It is actually this rapid cultural shift, the unexpected appearance of a full-fledged theological discourse replete with references to writing and scripture in the first/seventh century Arabian peninsula, that has tantalised Western scholars for generations. Understanding this revolution requires its contextualisation within the ancient Arabian literary tradition. The second chapter, entitled 'From Tribal Genealogy to Divine Covenant: Qur'anic Re-figurations of Pagan Arab Ideals Based on Biblical Models' (2012), shows that the Qur'an appeared in the midst of a society that obviously had not viewed writing as a medium of the utmost authority before, but still owed group coherence to genealogical bonds, collective rituals and a shared oral tradition. The chapter focuses on the transition of the pre-Islamic society away from the prevailing tribal model of societal coherence based on blood bonds and genealogy towards a new model which, in Jan Assmann's terms,[51] can be described as a community held together by the authority of writing and textual concerns. These two connective factors have been highlighted in Stroumsa's more recent work as manifesting major 'religious mutations of Late Antiquity' (to use the words from the subtitle of his book).[52] A third, powerful factor that distinguished the early Islamic community from its pagan or syncretistic milieu – the new linear, eschatologically oriented concept of time – is discussed in the third chapter, 'Glimpses of Paradise in the World and Lost Aspects of the World in the Hereafter: Two Qur'anic Re-readings of Biblical Psalms' (2012). This is a study of one of the most powerful motifs of the Qur'an – the motif of paradise – that can be credited with having had a major emotional impact on the listeners, not least because references to it are concentrated in the short, early suras that until today form the nucleus of the *qirā'āt*, the liturgical readings within prayer. The section ends with the fourth chapter, 'Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Early Meccan Suras' (1990 in German, 1993 in English), which investigates one of the most strikingly mantic phenomena in the Qur'an: the literary oaths. The literary oath, which draws on pre-Islamic pagan rhetoric but is at the same time closely related to the oracular speech of the Biblical prophets, was one of the earliest strategies used to lend prophetical authority to the early proclamations. Qur'anic oaths, in view of their peculiar lexicon, have often been viewed as particularly enigmatic and hence difficult to decode. Discussed in a common context and regarded as literary features, however, these oaths easily reveal their double function, serving both as stylistic strategies that affirm the proclaimer's prophethood and as forceful incipits (textual beginnings) that

imbue the ensuing text unit with a powerful underlying message: the imminence of the Day of Judgement.

Section II: The Liturgical Qur'an and the Emergence of the Community

Though the conversation between the various traditions and nascent Islam reflected in the Qur'an is at the heart of the chapters collected here, it is initially worth focusing on the liturgical enactments that enabled the Qur'an to first reach its listeners and eventually to make up the spiritual amalgam which kept the emerging community together. The fifth chapter, entitled 'From Recitation through Liturgy to Canon: Sura Composition and Dissolution during the Development of Islamic Ritual' (German, 1996), is meant to provide an extensive and detailed overview of the intra-Qur'anic traces of liturgical practices upheld in the community. The primarily liturgical purpose of the Qur'anic texts not only expresses itself in conventional liturgical forms, such as prayers and hymns, which are ubiquitous in the Qur'an, it also infuses the Qur'anic narratives with a highly stylised diction that serves to distinguish them from profane speech. Additionally, it implants the new message of the imminent eschatological catastrophe within the narratives. A particularly efficient means of fulfilling this purpose is the deployment of the stylistic device of the *clausula*. The *clausula* is the concluding rhymed phrase of a long verse that often entails a comment on the statement made in the verse, such as a homiletic address, a moral valorisation of the narrated event or a reminder of God's omnipotence. The *clausula* allows the narrative to make a continuous appeal to the listeners, thus turning the narrative into a complex communication, addressing the listeners in such a way that they are not merely passive receivers of the message but active participants digesting it and interacting with it.[53] It is exactly such discursive elements, so marginal in the Biblical narrative, that primarily matter in the Qur'an: the explicit moral and theological edification of the community, their integration into the history of the divine–human communication. This is achieved by merging the narrated facts or speeches of the Qur'an with reflections on the experience of the community.[54]

The two ensuing chapters focus on the emergence of the common prayer, the *Fātiḥa*. The sixth chapter, '*Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (Q. 1): Opening of the Textual Corpus of the Qur'an or Introit of the Prayer Service?' (German 1991), inquires into the status of the *Fātiḥa* as a Qur'anic sura and as the initial text recited in the prayer service. This query leads to a comparison with the analogous section of the Christian (and Jewish) prayer service. One has to keep in mind that it was only after the establishment of a complete and structurally diversified liturgical ritual

that the followers of the proclaimer could assert themselves as a community. The achievement of this important stage of development did not go unnoticed by the community itself; it therefore comes as no surprise that once a common prayer, the *Fātiḥa*, had been achieved, it was emphatically celebrated in the Qur'an, particularly in the middle Meccan *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (Q. 15), which is the topic of the seventh chapter, 'Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (Q. 15): Observations on the Qur'anic "Canonical Process" and the Emergence of a Community' (2000). This sura marks a turning point in the early stages of Qur'anic development since it proves – through multiple devices such as the echoing of the worshippers' voices, audible in the *Fātiḥa* – to be uniquely connected with the process of the emergence of the community.

The eighth chapter, 'From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple: *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (Q. 17), between Text and Commentary' (2003), draws on the equally highly significant institution of the direction of prayer (the *qibla*), which is closely connected to *Sūrat al-Isrā'*. Although the *qibla* towards Jerusalem is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, its institutionalisation can be inferred from particular debates reflected in middle Meccan suras. The adoption of the *qibla* towards Jerusalem (which gives expression to a more general theological orientation towards the Biblical world) was a momentous step taken in the earliest community's transformation from a socially marginal pious group into an established monotheistic community, much like that of the Banū Isrā'īl (the Israelites). Another important step towards the foundation of a self-conscious religious community, though not liturgical in a strict sense, is indicated by the appearance of the Decalogue, in the guise of a rhetorically impressive declaration, in the core part of *Sūrat al-Isrā'*. This phase of development is investigated in the ninth chapter, 'A Discovery of Evil in the Qur'an? Revisiting Qur'anic Versions of the Decalogue in the Context of Pagan Arab Late Antiquity' (2011). The Qur'anic re-reading of the Decalogue is attestation of the community's achievement of a new outlook on society, substantially correcting the pagan ethos of intra-tribal collective accountability, an outlook which was now informed by the individual's introspection and his or her deeply felt commitment towards the needy other. At the same time the Qur'anic Decalogue – in which the transfer of a key Biblical text onto the epistemic horizon of the new movement is manifest – expresses the community's desire to root itself in the Biblical canon.

Section III: Narrative Figures between the Bible and the Qur'an

This third and final section focuses on narratives that appear in both the Bible and the Qur'an, and contextualises the Qur'anic protagonists with their predecessors in the Bible and in post-Biblical traditions. Narrative as an

elaborative genre entered the Qur'anic discourse in the second Meccan period when the community had developed an awareness of their status as continuators of the Biblical elect, the Banū Isrā'īl. At this stage, not only did the earlier references to the Meccan sanctuary and other Arabian sites give way to remembrances of the Holy Land but extensive and detailed Biblical narratives started to supersede the more topical punitive legends of the earlier suras. This shift in focus from the historically disinterested tales of the doomed bygone communities of Arabia (the *umam khāliya*) to the epic Biblical narratives whose episodes were staged outside Arabia implies not just a changed view of the emerging Muslim community towards history and geography, but a reorientation of the religious performance: the axis of the entire cult of the early community was relocated from the local shrine to a remote sanctuary, Jerusalem, recognised as the place where the relevant memory of both the previous elects – the Jews and the Christians – and the new community converged.[55] Narratives seem to have occupied a particularly important position in the developing liturgy as well. The observation that they are almost always found at the centre of their respective suras, that is, exactly where a Biblical reading would fall in the church and synagogue service, invites the hypothesis that, by that time, the polythematic suras had become templates for the community's emerging ceremonial worship.

It has often been observed that Biblical narratives found in the Qur'an are recounted not once but, in most cases, several times. This Qur'anic peculiarity has raised a number of questions. Why was a retelling of a particular story deemed required? How should the diverse versions be arranged chronologically? Do the retellings primarily reflect a desire by the proclaimer to complete or to further explain a previous version, or, rather, are the retellings due to a change in perspective demanded by the new social and ideological conditions of the community? In other words, does the *Sitz im Leben* (the social context or setting in which and for which the respective narratives were composed) have to be taken into consideration? It is true that the chapters in this volume presuppose a 'canonical process', that is, a development of ever new texts out of a basic gamut of texts that had already been presented during the proclamation. Yet textual constraints – the premises already laid out by the first versions that should not be contradicted by the later ones – ought not be considered so binding as to marginalise the *Sitz im Leben* of the Qur'anic proclamation. History experienced in the Qur'an is not least the rendering present of a significant past; this past is evoked to shed light on the present and to imbue it with the distinguished aura ascribed to salvation history. The pre-canonical Qur'an, being the communication between a speaker and his audience, presents itself at the same time, by self-testimony and through its

form, as a communication between the human and the superhuman. The Qur'an is thus a liturgical text; this was so not only from the time of its later communal use, but was an innate quality from its very beginnings. The suras constitute complex genres that set them apart from Biblical storytelling and even more distinctly from profane speech.[56] As opposed to Biblical narration, which Robert Alter characterises as the 'straight narration of actions and speech, and only exceptionally and very briefly discourse, disquisition on and around the narrated facts and their implications',[57] Qur'anic narration pursues complex 'para-narrative' aims: to drive home such messages as God's omnipotence and the imminent Day of Judgement. It presents stories known from Biblical literature as messages from the transcendent scripture, *al-kitāb*, which is taken to be a corpus ranking beyond all other sources of stories known through oral tradition, and thus being of the highest authority.

The development of narrative did not, however, remain unaffected by community demands emerging in middle Meccan times, when opponents of the new faith questioned why the Qur'an had not been revealed to Muhammad all at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*, Q. 25:32),[58] the way the scriptures of other religious communities had. It is in the context of the debates stemming from such challenges that the immense advantage of the gradual revelation becomes clear. The open-ended nature of the orally presented text allowed for its continuous updating, a kind of targumisation, a process which seems to be implied by the often use of the word *tafṣīl* (exposition, elucidation) to describe the particular communication of the suras. Qur'anic narratives, then, need to be understood as constantly responding to the ever progressing theological insights of the community. At the same time, though, there were constants. The sura as a literary unit, established from the earliest phase of the communication, constituted a framework that remained valid. The particular intent of a communication was expressed through the sura as a whole, not only through a particular section of it. A narrative, therefore, has to be read in the context of its sura, the overall message of which must be taken into account as one of the hermeneutical dimensions of the narrative itself. Thus, it is the position of the sura as a whole which will determine the chronological status of the narrative as well.

The chapters in this section examine the depiction of prophetical stories from the Bible in the Qur'an and conclude that their portrayal reflects manifestations of a 'canonical process'.[59] The changing representation of the figure of Moses in the Meccan suras is examined in the tenth chapter, 'Narrative as a Canonical Process: The Story of Moses Seen through the Evolving History of the Qur'an' (2000).[60] The chapter not only discloses a set of very different perceptions of Moses in the Qur'an compared to the Bible but

also reveals a changing relationship between Muhammad and his main Biblical role model, thus allowing us to discern particular stages in the Prophet's developing self-image. The eleventh chapter, 'Oral Scriptures in Contact: The Qur'anic Story of the Golden Calf and its Position between Narrative, Cult and Inter-Communal Debate' (2004), looks at the radical re-reading of the Meccan portrayal of the Biblical story of the golden calf in light of later insights and convictions acquired in the Medinan era. The original Meccan account, in which the Israelites' idolatry bears no severe theological consequences, is later 'corrected' to include the agency of divine wrath that had been completely disregarded in the Meccan story. This concept was, however, vividly alive in Jewish tradition, for it plays a particularly important part in the Jewish reception of the story of the golden calf in the liturgy of the Day of Atonement. It seems that this liturgical reuse of the story in Jewish worship exerted a strong impact on the Medinan re-reading of the Meccan narrative of the golden calf where divine wrath is directed at the original heirs of Biblical tradition, embodied by the Medinan Jews. In this case, Biblical–Qur'anic figures turn out to be ideal loci of inter-communal debate.

Mary and Jesus are the focus of the next two chapters. The twelfth chapter, 'Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus: Reading *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) and Related Meccan Texts in the Context of the Qur'anic Communication Process' (2009), focusing on the perception of Mary and Jesus in the Meccan suras, reveals a process of a substantial but selective appropriation. The beginning of the Gospel of Luke is re-narrated, but all traces of a Christological interpretation have been deleted – a theological intervention that has, however, left clearly distinctive traces. The thirteenth chapter, 'Mary and Jesus: Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs. A Re-Reading of *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Q. 3)' (2005), shows that there was, in the Medinan period of the Qur'an, a strong religio-political intent to counterbalance the authority of the dominant Jewish presence with the Christian tradition. It is noteworthy that the Holy Family, Āl 'Imrān, receives a place of honour in the Qur'an only in a late (Medinan) phase of development and, moreover, only temporarily. The figure of Mary in particular undergoes an extraordinary theological development. Whereas in her first middle Meccan depiction, she is presented as a symbol of purity, a female figure remote from reality and endowed with almost mythical traits, her person in the Medinan text is not only reconnected to history but also associated with more abstract theological deliberations. Her story is used to shed light on the phenomenon of ambiguity involved in scripture, much as it is involved in procreation as well. It clearly transpires that in Medina, new Mariological and Christological discourses

had penetrated the theological horizons of the community and demanded to be dealt with.[61]

These two stories at the same time highlight the limitations of an exclusively historical-critical reading of the Qur'an, even when combined with a close reading of the sura. One would fail to grasp the full meaning of the stories by merely tracing the individual traditions underlying the Qur'anic version. What matters is not so much a particular textual model that may have 'influenced' the corresponding Qur'anic exposition (such as Luke 12, which is mirrored in the initial part of *Sūrat Maryam*), but the more general discourse that looms behind the story and which may go far beyond the immediate model, leading back to even earlier theological concerns. Though it is clearly the Christian story of the birth of John the Baptist and Christ that is the basis of the Qur'anic version in *Sūrat Maryam*, and again in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, the consideration of a more general theological question should not be disregarded: that is, the early community's concern with deciphering which of the two loci of piety was the more legitimate – the temple practices of the Jews (for whose continuation Zachariah is praying) or the post-temple, verbal service of the Christians (of which Zachariah's son will be a practitioner). The fourteenth and concluding chapter, 'Myths and Legends in the Qur'an? An Itinerary through its Narrative Landscape' (2004), inspired by the current approach of 'the Bible as literature' in Biblical studies,[62] attempts to classify the Qur'anic stories according to more general narratological criteria.

What all the studies collected in this volume have in common is that they adhere to a strictly diachronic reading of the Qur'an – as far as such a reading is possible, since the rearrangement of the suras in a chronological sequence has not yet been completed.[63] A second guiding principle is that they all take the meaning inherent in the entire sura into account in the discussions of the fragmented sections of texts. Taking the sura holistically in this way considers the *Sitz im Leben* of the text, the social and ideological situation of the community. This situation can presently only be deduced from the texts themselves.[64] An important criterion of distinction between earlier and later suras is – as Qur'anic scholarship in the tradition of Theodor Nöldeke has always held – their literary form and linguistic guise.[65] This applies also to the identification of later additions, recognisable by their often prosaic form and by discourses that breach the theological context of the nuclear text. The studies presented here view textual additions as a sign of intratextual dynamics, and by no means see it is a defect that would have to be emended by their elimination from the suras in which they appear.[66] Rather, the studies read them as a sort of interpretive (targumic) expansion which was necessary for updating the earlier communication of the nuclear text, and aligning it with the level of knowledge and theological awareness

reached by the community at a later time. The freedom to practice this kind of updating was part and parcel of the particular mode of revelation that was sent down not as a single, complete pronouncement but in stages, a little at a time. This trait characterises the Qur'an as having been primarily an oral scripture, the charter of a persistent divine–human communication.[67]

NOTES

1 This devaluation is current among scholars who focus on the Syriac subtexts of the Qur'an; see details of the rationale for this in chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West* (*lā sharqiyya wa lā gharbiyya*, Q. 24:35): Locating the Qur'an within the History of Scholarship', in this volume, as well as the introduction in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext* (Abingdon, 2010), pp. 3–36.

2 The term 'subtext' which would presuppose verifiable Qur'anic references to earlier texts is avoided in this volume. 'Intertexts' refers to works and traditions which seem to be echoed or reflected in the Qur'an.

3 Christian subtexts are postulated by scholars who focus on the Syriac traditions; see Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*. These subtexts are interpreted as sources of the Qur'an by a number of theologically trained scholars such as Karl-Heinz Ohlig, editor of a series of collected volumes on the Qur'an, see bibliography, and most recently by Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans: Neue Erkenntnisse aus der Sicht der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft* (Darmstadt, 2012). For a discussion of the problematics of such postulations, see chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'.

4 There is presently little interest among scholars in studying the Qur'an in isolation from its Biblical references, except for those who focus on the Qur'an's literary form, such as Shawkat Toorawa, Michael Sells and Devin Stewart. Qur'anic studies presently appears to revolve around the question of origins.

5 This ancient Christian view, which persisted into the last century, that the Bible is properly understandable only in light of Christian revelation and thus has to be kept detached completely from Jewish interpretation, is the focus of a seminal study by Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1992). Originally published as *Les Langues du Paradis: Aryans et Sémites, un couple providentiel* (Paris, 1989). The prevailing attitude in Qur'anic scholarship in the West concerning the subsidiary status of Islamic tradition vis-à-vis the Christian subtexts can be considered an extension of this view.

6 Peter Heath, 'Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches', *Arabica* 36 (1989), p. 177.

7 This applies in particular to the current 'Syriacist' scholarship which presupposes that Syriac homilies were models for narrative Qur'anic texts.

8 The religious status of the audience can only be deduced from the Qur'an itself. In view of the familiarity of many in the audience with the Biblical tradition, on the one hand, and the derision of such reminiscences by others, on the other, we may assume that both pagans and syncretists were among those listening to Muhammad.

9 See, for example, Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an* (Miami, FL, 2009).

10 'Intratextuality' here specifically refers to the relationship existing between the suras of the Qur'an; 'intertextuality' refers to the relationship existing between the Qur'an and texts external to it (such as the Bible).

11 For the problems associated with a diachronic reading of the Qur'an, see Nicolai Sinai, 'The Qur'an as Process', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 407–40.

12 The Corpus Coranicum project is currently undertaking a diachronic reading of the Qur'an; http://www.bbaw.de/en/research/Coran.

13 A new perspective on the conventional distinction of epochs is overdue. A challenging new model has been developed by Garth Fowden, *Before and After Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton, NJ, 2014). Extending the scope of Late Antiquity into Islam underlies a new research project presently being pursued in the programme 'From Logos to Kalam', which forms part of the larger research project 'Episteme in Motion' (Special Research Unit at the Freie Universität Berlin). Our particular concept of Late Antiquity primarily as an epistemic space is also indebted to the University of Göttingen's Courant Research Centre 'Education and Religion. From Early Imperial Roman Times to the Classical Period of Islam (EDRIS)' and particularly to its speaker, Prof. Peter Gemeinhardt, who in February 2013 convened an interdisciplinary workshop to discuss the concept of Late Antiquity from the perspectives of classical philology, Church history, philosophy and Islamic studies.

14 See Nicolai Sinai, 'Religious Poetry from the Quranic Milieu: Umayya b. Abī l-Ṣalt and the Fate of the Thamūd', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74, no. 3 (2011), pp. 397–416.

15 This insight is the focus of the research project entitled 'From Ruins to Resurrection' presently being carried out by Ghassan El Masri (Corpus Coranicum Project, Potsdam).

16 Guy G. Stroumsa, *Das Ende des Opferkults: Die religiösen Mutationen der Spätantike* (Berlin, 2011). Originally published as *La fin du sacrifice: Les mutations religieuses de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 2005). English translation of the French original: *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (Chicago, IL, 2009). Also, see chapter 2, 'From Tribal Genealogy to Divine Covenant: Qur'anic Refigurations of Pagan-Arab Ideals based on Biblical Models', in this volume.

17 See Manfred Ullmann, *Das Gespräch mit dem Wolf* (Munich, 1981); Georg Jacob, *Schanfarà-Studien*, vol. I, *Der Wortschatz der Lâmîja nebst Übersetzung und beigefügtem Text* (Munich, 1914); vol. II, *Parallelen und Kommentar zur Lâmîja, Schanfará-Bibliographie* (Munich, 1915).

18 See in particular Renate Jacobi, 'Bemerkungen zur frühislamischen Trauerpoesie', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 87 (1997), pp. 3–99; Gert Borg, *Mit Poesie vertreibe ich den Kummer meines Herzens: Eine Studie zur altarabischen Trauerklage der Frau (Ufarriju hamm ṣadrī bi'l-qarīḍ)* (Istanbul, 1997); Kirill Dmitriev, *Das poetische Werk des Abū Ṣaḫr al-Huḍalī: Eine literaturanthropologische Studie* (Wiesbaden, 2008); Tilman Seidensticker, *Altarabisch 'Herz' und sein Wortfeld* (Wiesbaden, 1992).

19 For more on this, see the discussion of the Qur'anic Decalogue in chapter 9, 'A Discovery of Evil in the Qur'an? Revisiting Qur'anic Versions of the Decalogue in the Context of Pagan Arab Late Antiquity', in this volume.

20 See, for example, Ute Franke *et al.*, eds., *Roads of Arabia: The Archaeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia* (Berlin, 2011).

21 These traits were recently studied by Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago, IL, 2009).

22 See chapter 4, 'Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Early Meccan Suras', in this volume.

23 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, '"Debate with them in a better way": The Construction of a Qur'anic Commonplace', in Neuwirth *et al.*, *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures*, pp. 163–88.

24 Such debates and negotiations are strongly reminiscent of the stratagems of persuasion that Peter Brown has highlighted for the Christian culture of Late Antiquity; see Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI, 1992).

25 Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (London, 2002).

26 See Angelika Neuwirth, 'The "Discovery of Writing" in the Qur'an: Tracing an Epistemic Revolution in Late Antiquity', in Nuha al-Shaar, ed., *The Qur'an and* Adab: *The Shaping of Classical Literary Traditions* (Oxford, forthcoming publication).

27 See chapter 3, 'Glimpses of Paradise in the World and Lost Aspects of the World in the Hereafter: Two Qur'anic Re-Readings of Biblical Psalms', in this volume; Angelika Neuwirth, 'In Search of a New Qur'anic Philology: Locating the Qur'an in the Epistemic Space of Late Antiquity', in Andrew Rippin and Roberto Tottoli, eds., *De islamicarum litterarum libris/Books and Written Culture of the Islamic World* (Leiden, forthcoming); Daniel A. Madigan, 'God's Word to the World: Jesus and the Qur'ān, Incarnation and Recitation', in Terence Merrigan and Frederik Glorieux, eds., *'Godhead Here in Hiding': Incarnation and the History of Human Suffering* (Leuven, 2012), pp. 157–72. Originally published as 'Gottes Botschaft an die Welt: Christen und Muslime, Jesus und der Koran', *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift 'Communio'* 32 (2003), pp. 100–112.

28 For more discussion on this, see chapter 4, 'Images'.

29 On the concept of 'canonisation from below', see Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, 'Kanon und Zensur als kultursoziologische Kategorien', in Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, eds., *Kanon und Zensur: Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation* (Munich, 1987), p. 22. See also chapter 10, 'Narrative as a Canonical Process: The Story of Moses Seen through the Evolving History of the Qur'an', in this volume.

30 See chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures in Contact: The Qur'anic Story of the Golden Calf', in this volume.

31 See Tilman Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe in Mekkanischen Suren* (Göttingen, 1995).

32 Nicolai Sinai, 'Qur'ānic Self-Referentiality as a Strategy of Self-Authorization', in Stefan Wild, ed., *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān* (Wiesbaden, 2006), pp. 103–34.

33 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 142–5.

34 See the frequent verse introductions '*they will question thee*' (*yas'alūnaka 'an*), found in Q. 2:219, Q. 2:220, Q. 2:222, Q. 5:4, Q. 7:187, Q. 8:1 and Q. 17:85, for example.

35 See, for example, the discussion of the 'clear' and the 'ambiguous' verses in chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures'.

36 Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004); idem, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, IN, 1990).

37 For essential contextualisation, see Joseph Witztum, 'The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'an: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2011).

38 For techniques of persuasion, see chapter 7, 'Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (Q. 15): Observations on the Qur'anic "Canonical Process" and the Emergence of a Community', in this volume; for the translation of pagan language into a Biblically imprinted language, see chapter 2, 'Genealogy'; for typological re-readings of earlier traditions, see chapter 8, 'From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple: *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (Q. 17), between Text and Commentary', in this volume; and for the reinterpretation ('targumisation') of Biblical images of majesty into local poetic ones, see chapter 3, 'Glimpses of Paradise'.

39 Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, PA, 2009). This work lucidly 'radiographs' Christian and early Muslim attitudes towards violence in search of underlying foundational narratives.

40 Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, p. 328.

41 Ibid., p. 274.

42 Ibid., p. 274.

43 Ibid, p. 149.

44 Silvia Horsch, *Tod im Kampf: Figurationen des Märtyrers in frühen sunnitischen Schriften* (Würzburg, 2011).

45 See chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'; see also Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 158–68.

46 See chapter 3, 'Glimpses'; see also Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

47 Cf. Proverbs 8:22–3 and see Boyarin, *Border Lines*.

48 See in particular chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus: Reading *Sūrat Maryam* and Related Meccan Texts in the Context of the Qur'anic Communication Process', and chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus: Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs. A Re-reading of *Sūrat Maryam* in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*'.

49 Samples of the reconstruction of Qur'anic history on the basis of literary investigations are offered in this volume in chapters 10 to 13 ('Narrative', 'Oral Scriptures', 'Imagining Mary' and 'Mary and Jesus'); see also Angelika Neuwirth, 'Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory: The Qur'ānic Path towards Canonization as Reflected in the Anthropogonic Accounts', in Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch, eds., *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies* (Beirut, 2001), pp. 113–52.

50 Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

51 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992). Translated into English as *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge, 2011).

52 Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice*.

53 For more on the *clausula*, see Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, (Berlin, 1976; 2nd edn., 2007), pp. 157–74.

54 For more details on the relation between the narrated facts and the experiences of the community, see Angelika Neuwirth, 'Qur'an and History – A Disputed Relationship: Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003), pp. 15–16.

55 Ibid., p. 15.

56 Ibid., p. 16.

57 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981), p. 184.

58 *The unbelievers say, 'Why has the Koran not been sent down upon him all at once? . . .'* (*Wa qāla'lladhīna kafarū law lā nazala 'alayhi'l-qur'ānu jumlatan wāḥidatan . . .*, Q. 25:32). See also Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

59 See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia, 1979).

60 The figures of Adam and Iblīs (Satan) are similarly discussed in Neuwirth, 'Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory'.

61 See Michael Marx, 'Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'ān: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious-Polemical Debate', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 533–64.

62 See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

63 A rearrangement of the early Meccan suras has been attempted in Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I.

64 A critical reading of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature (the works on the 'occasions of the revelation') will ultimately be indispensible for understanding the context within which the Qur'an emerged.

65 Here, the chapters rely on the older study, Neuwirth, *Studien*.

66 The texts identified as additions to the early Meccan suras have been collected in the appendix of Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 742–5.

67 A note of apology for one particular deficit of the volume may be due here. It will not have escaped the reader's notice that the studies collected in this volume are less concerned with intertextuality than with intratextuality. This is, at least partly, due to the urgency to counterbalance an almost absolute scholarly preference for 'source studies' (of texts outside of the Qur'an) over literary studies (of the Qur'an itself). Much important work has been

done during the last decade in the field of source studies by Arabists and/or scholars in religious studies or, more recently, by theologians such as Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann and Karl-Heinz Ohlig (though often without a sound interpretation of the findings). In contrast, only a few studies can be named in the field of literary research on the Qur'an. Here, it is striking that only a minority of scholars – almost exclusively members of the Corpus Coranicum project – consciously and systematically take a diachronic stance, acknowledging the text as the document of a dynamic process. It is this particular state of the art that may serve as justification for focusing on the literary side of Qur'anic scholarship and, without altogether ignoring intertextuality, for highlighting some of the most important Qur'anic discourses from a literary perspective.

SECTION I

Pagan and Monotheistic Frameworks

1

Neither of the East nor of the West (lā sharqiyya wa lā gharbiyya, Q. 24:35): Locating the Qur'an within the History of Scholarship*

WHY START a volume on Qur'anic studies with a negation, the forbidding statement of an exclusion? Applying a somewhat daring interpretation, one may hold that it is the Qur'an itself that, in one of its most striking self-referential verses, seems to forbid any attribution of its earthly manifestation to a determined space, be it even symbolic. The Qur'anic verse evoked in the introductory motto of Q. 24:35, the Verse of Light (*āyat al-nūr*), ascribes the earthly reflection of God's light to neither an Eastern nor a Western source; the fluid that nourishes the 'oil lamp' which, according to the uniquely comprehensive metaphor of Q. 24:35, radiates His light, stems from a mysterious olive tree that is *neither of the East nor of the West*. This Qur'anic statement should serve as a subtle caveat to the researcher to not appropriate the Qur'an for the determination of any particular narrative of origin.

More than thirty years after the publication of the *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, it is worth our casting a fresh eye over the considerably changed situation of Qur'anic research. Not only have the methodological approaches undergone decided changes, but so too has the subject itself, the image of the Qur'an (if, indeed, it is still possible to call it a single image), for the Qur'an in the present day is more controversial than ever, as far as textual history and exegesis are concerned. It is not possible to explain this state of affairs as simply a result of the new political and ideological situation;[1] it becomes comprehensible only by taking a retrospective overview of the history of Qur'anic research, the beginnings of which extend several decades into the

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Ein Versuch der historischen und forschungsgeschichtlichen Verortung des Koran', in Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1976; 2nd edn, 2007), pp. 1–54. Reprinted courtesy of Walter de Gruyter. Translation of the original provided by Gwendolin Goldbloom.

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past. In this chapter, this development will be traced in broad outlines, showing the continuing desideratum for a thorough literary analysis of the structures of the Qur'an in the vein of Biblical scholarship. The Qur'an, heuristically, must be first considered as an oral transmission before being subjected to textual experiments, such as those undertaken in recent studies, in order to vindicate the hypothesis of a pre-Islamic or a later origin of the text. The fact that such an analytical study has been outstanding for so long, and that the sole extensive study of the Qur'anic composition, the *Studien*,[2] provided it for only a part of the Qur'an, should be regarded as an indication that the Qur'an has always been viewed conceptually (and methodologically as well) as existing outside the canon of monotheistic scriptures.[3] Due to this essentialist view, a number of outworn stereotypes still survive, even in more recent Qur'anic studies. In order to present this development, it will be necessary to go somewhat further back in time.

The Genesis of the Qur'an: The Myths of Origin

Though from an intra-Islamic perspective the Qur'an is an eternal text that transcends history, it has always been historically linked to the time of its proclaimer, the Prophet Muhammad; as such, for many within the Muslim world, the event of the revelation and Muhammad's proclamation of the Qur'an mark the beginning of Islamic history. Outside the Muslim world, the Prophet was not a shadow of a figure either, but was perceived for centuries in the grand dimensions of an arch-enemy, indeed an antichrist.[4] During the Enlightenment, however, his stature was restored to human-sized proportions when he came to be viewed as a man of letters, the 'author' of the Qur'an – though he was still cast in a negative light, being regarded as an imposter, a manipulator of scripture. It was not until the rise of historicism that the image of the Islamic Prophet, previously associated in Europe with despotism and manipulation, was finally 'civilised',[5] and he came to be viewed as a sincere seeker of truth, though his spiritual horizon was deemed limited. The Qur'an, attributed to him as his literary work, was equally looked upon with ambivalence. On the one hand, it was a text that demanded respect in that it expressed genuine religiosity and its poetical radiance was comprehensible in places; on the other hand, in the eyes of European Biblical scholars it was no more than the work of an epigone and, thus, could not compare with the preceding Biblical scriptures.

All the more surprising for the Western beholder, then, Islam's success within world history, the triumphal march of the new religious movement which was comparable only to that of Alexander's conquests. Though not

during Muhammad's lifetime but shortly after his death, a wave of Arab conquests completely reshaped the map of the eastern and southern Mediterranean lands, and culminated in the establishment of Islam as a new world religion. While one could argue that this achievement was not the Prophet's alone but involved many determining protagonists, it is hard to overestimate Muhammad's charismatic presence, his rapid success in founding a community and the lasting impact of the textual corpus left by him that made this whole development at all possible.

The ascription of such accomplishments exclusively to Muhammad in the time frame suggested teeters dangerously on the edge of being ahistorical and thus invites revisionist responses. Islamic tradition allows Muhammad a disproportionately short time for his achievement. If we go along with the traditional accounts, he was born around 570 CE, made his first public appearance in Mecca in 610 CE and was forced to emigrate to Medina in 622 CE where he died ten years later, in 632 CE, having successfully spread his teachings across much of the Arabian peninsula.[6] It is hardly surprising that such a steep trajectory of success by a man from a remote corner of the late antique *ecumene* (i.e. the 'inhabited world' known at that time) was met with scepticism and doubt by more critical scholars in the West. Many aspects of the story appeared improbable and provoked several questions: How could a message to the pagans of the Arabian peninsula solidify into a new religion within a mere twenty-two years? How could a scripture be fixed and canonised so soon after the proclaimer's death and survive in its authentic form until our times? In the face of this implausibility, Western scholars came up with hypotheses that led them to very different views of early Islamic history than those passed down through Islamic tradition. They suggested that the key events of Islam might have taken place in a different region, at a different time and, occasionally, even without Muhammad's participation. It must, however, be said that all such reconstructions so far have been incompatible with one another and do not really offer a plausible explanation of events. Until today, it has not been possible to construct an alternative history of the genesis of Islam.

All the same, there is no way round a thorough review of the established positions. According to the dominant traditional Islamic view which has influenced traditional Western scholarship, relevant Arabian history started with the Qur'an's revelation. This myth of origin, which diminishes the preceding history as an age that was notable primarily for the nomadic lifestyle with which it was associated, has been targeted by critics like the Lebanese historian Samir Kassir: 'All that survives of the preceding times is a chaotic picture condensed in the term *Jāhiliyya*, understood as [the] "age of

ignorance".[7] In such a framework, *jāhiliyya*, construed as pre-Islamic barbarism, serves as a dark contrasting foil to the new, enlightened civilisation brought by Islam. However, according to Kassir,

> The chaotic picture [of the *jāhiliyya*] cannot be upheld if we take into consideration research results in the fields of Hellenic and Roman history documented by archaeology, epigraphy and numismatics. Arabian towns in the northern Hijaz were entirely romanised, to the extent that there are Roman emperors who originated from there. The militant nomadism on which the later Arabian world of ideas draws is thoroughly put into perspective, and we can imagine what kind of Copernican paradigm shift would be ushered in by the acknowledgment of a Golden Age preceding the actual Golden Age.[8]

Kassir advocates a more open view of Arab-Islamic history, one not constrained by the teleological postulate that such a history only emerged as a result of the revelation communicated by Muhammad. Kassir's call for a radical revision of this view of history based on the Islamic foundation myth (which continues to be held in wider circles of the Middle East to this day) – or, to put it differently, his call for a re-contextualisation of Arab-Islamic history within Judeo-Christian Late Antiquity – must not be seen as encouraging the radical deconstruction of the genesis of Islam. It does, however, identify a fateful narrowing of perspective that has resulted in a misrepresentation of history.

Studies of the Qur'anic Text Superseded by Studies of Muhammad: A Great Tradition of Research and its Violent Abruption

The scholarly decision to locate the Qur'an within Late Antiquity is by no means a new one. Already, in the 1830s, a scholarly approach that was to remain fruitful for over a century had begun to submit the Qur'an to a historical reading against the background of the various cultures of Late Antiquity. The first step was taken by Abraham Geiger, one of the founders of the Jewish reform movement of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism), who, in his groundbreaking work *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (1833),[9] attempted to identify Biblical and post-Biblical traditions reflected in the Qur'an.[10] Historical-critical approaches continued to be applied in Qur'anic studies during the second half of the nineteenth century by scholars educated in Jewish tradition (especially Hartwig Hirschfeld and Ignaz Goldziher), who worked alongside experts in classical Arabic literature (Nöldeke) or Biblical texts (Julius Wellhausen). In the first half of the twentieth century, these studies were further advanced by

later researchers from the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, such as Josef Horovitz and his school, all of whom recognised new readings of Biblical and post-Biblical Jewish traditions in the Qur'an. Pulling the Qur'an out of the frame of reference of the pre-Islamic pagan environment, they located it within the wider context of the pluricultural world of Late Antiquity. Until this research tradition was violently brought to an end by the Nazi terror in Germany in the 1930s, the contextualisation of the Qur'an with Rabbinical literature, introduced by Geiger,[11] was most influential in Qur'anic studies and resulted in a number of standard reference works indispensable to this day.[12] In particular, Heinrich Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, published in 1931,[13] can be considered a summa of the discoveries collected up to that time of Jewish and, to a lesser extent, Christian traditions reflected in the Qur'an. To this day, however, his findings await full evaluation; the crucial question of the particular restructurings and reinterpretations that the identified Jewish and Christian intertexts underwent during the Qur'anic process of communication between Muhammad and his community cannot be answered by merely identifying and presenting the material.

All the same, it was the combined historical-critical and literary approaches pursued during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that, for the first time, made Qur'anic texts recognisable for what they were during the period of their emergence, before their canonisation and before they became the foundation documents of a new religion – namely, new answers to the core problems of their time. These answers were worked out in spirited disputes over the theological positions held by the neighbouring religions which the Qur'anic community in part accepted, in part negotiated and modified, and in part rejected and replaced with new, indigenous ones. It is this process alone which explains the success of the message and the survival of the Qur'anic community after the messenger's death. Studying this contest of traditions, as we may call it, one realises that there is not a direct path from the Biblical to the Qur'anic texts; very frequently, texts were transmitted via Rabbinical and early Christian exegesis. The concern of Qur'anic studies with the multilingual and pluricultural literary heritage which the Biblical and Islamic traditions share make it part of the studies of Late Antiquity.

The scholars from the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* consciously focused on the Qur'anic text itself rather than on its later exegesis and thus concentrated on a stage during which the Prophet's addressees were still developing into an established religious community. For once, the Qur'an was being observed not from the retrospective of later, exclusively Islamic, exegesis, but rather from a contemporaneous point of view – as a text which was still *in statu nascendi* and which had, therefore, not yet formed particular denominational ties. The

Studien followed the same approach, regarding the Qur'an not as an 'Islamic' text but as an evolving, pre-canonical text. It is true that some of the assumptions of the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (e.g. with respect to Muhammad's authorship of the Qur'an and the unoriginality of its content) reflect undisputedly weak aspects of this line of research, ultimately continuing topoi of ancient Christian polemic that had been directed against Islam. However, the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* were not alone in valuing older texts above the Qur'an; so, too, did the scholars of classical Arabic literature. The founding father of modern Qur'anic philology in European languages, Nöldeke – whose *Geschichte des Qorans* outlining a chronology of the suras is still widely in use to this day, though it was first published in 1860[14] – arrived at a similarly dismissive evaluation of the Qur'an after judging it against the style and language of classical Arabic literature. He took Muhammad's role as the literary author of the Qur'an to be a given and deemed his poetic ability to be inferior to that of the ancient Arab poets.[15]

In any case, the politically enforced discontinuation of the historical-critical study of the text of the Qur'an, which occurred when the Jewish scholars were expelled from German universities in 1933, resulted in a drastic regression in Qur'anic studies. Not only did the important achievements of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* become stagnant, but soon their significance was also marginalised. Scholars of the 1930s, such as Johann Fück and Tor Andrae,[16] instead looked to the Qur'an as a document of the Prophet's psychological evolution, not shying away from an anachronistic orientation towards the traditional biography of the Prophet. This was an unmistakeable narrowing of the scholarly horizons occupied earlier. Fück regarded the 'examination of questions of [Muhammad's] dependence [on other scriptures]' as a dead end, viewing it as an attempt to dissect 'the Prophet's character into the sum of a thousand characteristics'.[17] The task of this new 'Muhammad research' was, instead, to show 'how the Prophet merged a number of elements from among the intellectual and spiritual impulses of his environment into a synthesis that was original and viable as a whole'.[18] Though Muhammad was the core subject of the research of the 1930s, analysis of the literary aspect of the Qur'an was not completely abandoned, albeit the interest was not in its literary-artistic character but its structural and stylistic nature. In the 1930s, for example, Richard Bell formulated the document hypothesis to explain the striking phenomenon of the frequently repeated narratives and ideas found in the Qur'an.[19] Earlier still, Karl Vollers had examined the language of the Qur'an for dialectal interferences,[20] while Alphonse Mingana had attempted to detect specifically Syriac interferences.[21] Around the same time, Anton Baumstark discovered Jewish and Christian liturgical formulas in the Qur'an, thus

contributing considerably to a new understanding of the Qur'an as a liturgical text.[22] The only work of literary criticism in the strict sense of the term (after David Heinrich Müller's early attempt to prove that Biblical-prophetic styles of speech existed in the Qur'an[23]) was Gustav Richter's *Der Sprachstil des Koran*,[24] which, however, remained unfinished.

Despite its narrowing of focus, Qur'anic studies in the 1930s and 1940s did excel in the area of textual criticism – 'the technique of restoring texts as nearly as possible to their original form'.[25] This progress was mainly due to the work of two scholars, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Arthur Jeffery. Though the *Plan eines Apparatus Criticus zum Koran* begun by Bergsträsser was unfortunately never realised,[26] he nevertheless made important sources available to scholarship. In the course of collecting material for the *Apparatus*, he published a critical edition of one of the few known ancient collections of uncanonical Qur'anic readings;[27] furthermore, he edited the collection of variant readings by the main founder of Qur'anic textual studies, Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936), contained in the selection by Ibn Jinnī (d. 391/1001).[28] In conjunction with Bergsträsser, Arthur Jeffery worked on Islamic sources relevant to textual criticism.[29] His collection of uncanonical readings is indispensible as a reference work to this day.[30] Far less easily accessible than the uncanonical readings, however, are the canonical ones. In this field, as well, Bergsträsser was the first to more exactly work out the characteristics of the variants by examining a cross-section of the readings transmitted by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), one of the fourteen readers (authorities whose reading systems were accepted as binding for the community).[31] Bergsträsser, who also undertook an assessment of the Cairo edition of the Qur'an,[32] summarised the results of his textual criticism in a monograph attached as a third volume to the *Geschichte des Qorans* begun by Nöldeke and continued by Friedrich Schwally. After Bergsträsser's untimely death in 1933, this work was completed by Otto Pretzl,[33] who had made other works of Qur'anic criticism more widely available as well.[34] After Pretzl's death in 1941, the work of the Bergsträsser school was continued by Anton Spitaler;[35] Spitaler's main interest, however, soon shifted from Qur'anic textual criticism to the study of Arabic poetry, grammar and phraseology.

After World War II, the direction of Qur'anic studies was mostly determined by W. Montgomery Watt and Rudi Paret.[36] Their central subject of research, like that of Fück before them, was the life and the ministry of the Prophet. This continued focus is most likely explained by the parallel orientation of research in Christian theology, the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* – critical research on the life of Jesus – which was being conducted with great dedication in Germany during the first half of the century. Neither prepared to realise the

merit of studying the Qur'an as a literary text[37] nor qualified to examine its dialectical relationship with the preceding religious traditions, due to the lack of required linguistic and theological skills, Qur'anic scholars turned to the study of the psychological evolution of Muhammad, whom they considered to be the author of the Qur'an. Literary approaches were also generally not the focus of post-war scholarship, the only exception being textual criticism, which was continued for some time.[38] An important avenue of research was thus abandoned. Not only was there almost no discussion of the positions held earlier in historical and literary scholarship but the very basis of all historical Qur'anic research, Nöldeke's chronology of the suras, was abandoned. Thus, Paret's commentary,[39] regarded as authoritative since it was first published in the 1970s, does not attach any importance to the chronology of the suras, but simply analyses them in the order of their appearance in the corpus. In adducing other Qur'anic texts to explain a particular sura under scrutiny, he disregards their chronological order and consequently the functional relationship between them, thus both ignoring previous discoveries related to Qur'anic intratextuality and failing to make important observations on the matter himself. Viewed summarily, therefore, post-war Qur'anic studies appears to have been characterised by a narrowing of perspective. The research from the 1930s until the 1970s which focused on Muhammad entertained a simplified idea of the genesis of the Qur'an. It ignored the more nuanced possibility that Muhammad's understanding of extant textual traditions may not have been the only decisive factor in the emergence and formation of the newly evolving faith tradition. It equally failed to consider that the evidence of Muhammad's continuous interaction with his community may be reflected in the Qur'an.

Later Research on the Qur'an: The Question of Genuineness

Wansbrough, Crone and Cook

Not least in response to the simplistic approaches described previously, the British scholar John Wansbrough in 1977 published his revolutionary work which challenged the idea that the Prophet was the author of the Qur'an and formulated a new scenario for the text's appearance.[40] It is no exaggeration to say that Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* struck like a thunderbolt, revolutionising a field of study that had become methodologically narrow and uncritically reliant on traditional sources.[41] His work radically questions the very paradigm of history evolved by Islamic tradition which was, until then, accepted as authoritative, and designs a new vision of early Islamic history.

Given the remarkable echoes of Biblical and post-Biblical traditions in the Qur'an, Wansbrough concluded that the Qur'an was the result of an interreligious debate that most likely had taken place between second/eighth-century Mesopotamian scholars belonging to a syncretistic community and their Jewish and Christian opponents. Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* was followed that same year by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's *Hagarism*,[42] a similarly relentless attempt at deconstruction which postulated Syria/Palestine as the site of the Qur'an's origin. Wansbrough's theory induced a shift particularly in early Islamic studies in the English-speaking world, as is clear from the works of not just Crone and Cook but Andrew Rippin and Gerald Hawting for instance.[43] According to these scholars, it was not Muhammad who had 'assimilated' traditions of other religions but a circle of redactors, not clearly determinable but probably members of a polemical 'sectarian' community in Syria or southern Iraq, who had added the theological traces of Jewish and Christian traditions to the text. These redactors are assumed to have embedded a mythical prophet's 'logia' into diverse literary genres, in particular the simulations of debates, thereby compiling a 'Meccan–Muhammadan *evangelium*' in order to affirm the foundation myth (developed retrospectively) that Islam originated in the ancestral home of the Arabs. Thus, the Wansbrough school, as well, believes that the Qur'an originated as a fixed, written work rather than as a malleable entity that was shaped over time by a process of oral communication. This perspective was born out of a profound epistemological pessimism. Constrained by their revisionist preconception, these scholars assume that historical reality is so deeply warped that, today, it is impossible to discover any exact information concerning the early history of Islamic scripture. Thus, not only was the idea that an original community had emerged from the Hijaz assigned to the realm of pious legend but any attempt to undertake a microstructural review of the text and the history of its growth was branded meaningless, and was abandoned.[44]

Although the views of the Wansbrough school were soon challenged by more cautious scholars, they did introduce a lasting reinterpretation of the Qur'anic text. The Qur'an became perceived as a text whose exact time of origin or author could not ultimately be determined. The one factor that had the most lasting effect on any subsequent research was the rigorous de-historicising of the Qur'an. The Qur'an and the *sīra* (which was codified around 150 years after the Qur'an) now appear contemporaneous; indeed, it is as if they were the parallel manifestations of one and the same syncretistic theology. According to Wansbrough, both texts are retrospective projections – of recent religious evolutions onto a mythical past, of an urban

sectarian environment onto the ancestral home of the Arabs – whose purpose is to provide a foundation for the Islamic myth of origin. However, the mingling of the genesis of these two key texts of Islam, both of which reflect strongly divergent theological positions, makes a 'revisionist' reconstruction of early Islam seem extremely improbable.

Although Wansbrough claims to follow Biblical criticism models he disregards the first of the successive methodological steps required there, that is, the application of lower criticism (*Literarkritik*). Scholars use this method to decide on the unity of individual texts or of their secondary collation respectively. Wansbrough arrives at a decision about the text even before its analysis: he proceeds from the assumption that the Qur'an is accessible to us only as a *fait accompli*, in the shape of a compilation achieved by anonymous authors belonging not to the nascent community but to a later, probably Judaeo-Christian, community. Because of this methodological omission, the growth process of that compilation is therefore no longer verifiable. Wansbrough's dating of the Qur'an to a post-Muhammadan period is an unsupported verdict rather than the result of actual research. Even so, his *Quranic Studies* remains an epistemological breakthrough: having challenged ossified positions and posed new questions formulated from a wide spectrum of ideas, the work is assured of maintaining its status as the catalyst for the changes seen in recent Qur'anic research.

Lüling and Luxenberg

Attempts by two German scholars in the 1970s and the 2000s to revise the traditional conception of the origin of the Qur'an followed a much more positivist methodology. Both saw the Qur'an as merely a rewriting of an earlier Christian text. In 1974, Günther Lüling caused a sensation with his claim that the Qur'anic text that had been transmitted through the ages was not authentic (i.e. it was not a text originally going back to the time of Muhammad),[45] but was actually based on a collection of Christian hymns in an Arabic dialect, a sort of Christian proto-Qur'an. According to Lüling, Muhammad – taking advantage of the ambiguities in the ancient Arabic script which, at that time, was not only still un-vocalised but had employed several multivalent consonant signs – reinterpreted the Christian hymns to form a new text. The transmitted form of the Qur'an was claimed to be due to an even later redaction, an assertion which Sinai says 'turned Muhammad's original message, radical criticism of monotheistic high religion uttered from the point of view of ancient Arabian polytheism, upside down for reasons of political opportunism'.[46] Sinai summarises Lüling's theory and characterises his work as follows:

> Lüling, who restates Karl Vollers' hypothesis of the Qur'an's vernacular form,[47] presumes a heretic Christian background, or at least an anti-Imperial Church background, for his 'proto-Qur'an'. During Late Antiquity, he postulates, the Arabian peninsula was the retreat of an anti-Trinitarian Judeo-Christianity that had not been contaminated by the Trinitarian speculation of Greek theology. Byzantine orthodoxy, armed with imperial means of coercion, pushed this authentic Christianity into a more and more defensive position in Arabia, and Muhammad's response to this was to intensify the Judeo-Christians' criticism of Hellenised theology. His intention would thus have been the restoration of a pagan fertility cult, which Lüling assumes to have been the driving force behind early Christianity. Jesus and Muhammad share the same fate: they were both revolting against just that militant orthodoxy which was to embrace them posthumously ... Lüling's undertaking is motivated by a fundamental impulse of radical social criticism which views human history as the history of human self-abandon and self-denial, the chronicle of the defection from ideal origins.[48]

Critics not only accused Lüling of forging a conspiracy theory (i.e. that the fact of the transmitted Qur'an being falsified had been kept a secret by Islamic scholars), but also of circular reasoning (i.e. the attempt to recover the authentic Qur'an through an interpretation influenced by his own preconceptions).[49] Even more seriously problematic, however, is the author's hermeneutical outlook. The parameter by which Lüling measured the Qur'an's genuineness, that is, by how closely the texts resembled Christian hymns (the allegedly authentic parts of the Qur'an showing similarities to the hymns and the falsified parts diverging from them), implies that he recognised genuine religious self-expression in Christianity exclusively; Muhammad and his community, in his view, could not be credited with anything more than mere manipulation of extant Christian poetry. The truism that Qur'anic forms often respond to earlier Christian ones is rashly interpreted as concrete proof of dependence.

A further attempt at reconstruction was made by Christoph Luxenberg in 2000.[50] His thesis is based on linguistic arguments; he postulates that a Biblical lectionary was the basis of the Qur'an which, in his view, reflects a translation of a Syriac text into an early, still undeveloped, form of Arabic. This early Arabic language, he claims, was so heavily interspersed with elements of ecclesiastical Syriac lexically, syntactically and morphologically, that it constituted a Syro-Arabic linguistic blend which cannot be analysed using the rules of classical Arabic. Once this text – due to the Arab expansion

movement – was detached from the syncretistic milieu in which it originated, its linguistic hybridity would have been incomprehensible to the purely Arabic-speaking elite of early Islam; they would then have re-edited it to make it understandable. Luxenberg's hypothesis is, thus, that the Qur'an was based on a non-Arabic Christian text that was rewritten (in a manner not elucidated) as an Arabic-Islamic text. Once again there is a verdict that the Qur'an is an epigone, a mere imitation of Biblical predecessors.

Luxenberg's approach often requires more than one step of lexical transformation to reconstruct the allegedly original Syriac wording,[51] of which he gives a number of examples. Central to his argument, however, is the elimination of two Qur'anic theological convictions which he considers to be incompatible with a post-Biblical text: the communication of a divine message through divine inspiration (*waḥy*) and the existence of the virgins of paradise (*al-ḥūr al-ʿīn*). According to Luxenberg, both of these theologoumena are present in the Qur'an only due to misinterpretations of the Syriac texts. According to the Syriac reading on which the word *waḥy* is based, the meaning of the term would be none other than 'translation'; thus, following Luxenberg's theory, the Qur'an identifies itself not as a revelation but as a translation. Equally, the notion of the virgins of paradise in the Qur'an is the result of a misreading; the actual subjects of the passages in question, he claims, are 'white grapes'. Of course, in order to prove this, a multitude of related 'misreadings' have to be reversed, as the various contexts of the references to virgins have to be rewritten to suit his interpretation of white grapes as well. Luxenberg's tour de force has been honoured particularly in non-scholarly circles. In spite of its technical nature, his book achieved global fame after 2001, when the media discovered for themselves the post-Qur'anic martyr myth with its focus on the virgins of paradise. The provocation the book poses to research, however, lies elsewhere. As Sinai points out that,

> to a high degree, [his hypothesis] rests with the fact that he denies Arabic Studies the monopoly of interpreting the Qur'an. Unless a scholar possesses profound knowledge of non-Arabic religious writings of Late Antiquity, he cannot do justice to the historical situation from which the Qur'an emerged. However, while this criticism is justified, Luxenberg then assumes a similar monopoly of interpretation for himself when he postulates that it is impossible for anyone without knowledge of Syriac to decode the Qur'an.[52]

Thus, if we follow Luxenberg's theory to its conclusion, the true text of the Qur'an is not accessible to its Arab readers at all; instead, it only reveals itself to those learned in Syriac-Aramaic religious language.

Legacies of Revisionist Scholarship in Qur'anic Studies

Despite the translation of their works into English, Lüling and Luxenberg's hypotheses of the pre-existence of the Qur'anic text in a Christian form have not found general support. The scholars have been criticised for taking a simplistic approach to the traditions of Late Antiquity and of only paying attention to the Qur'anic text selectively, for it enters their vision only as a written, Christian–Islamic palimpsest. What connects their outlooks with Wansbrough's – who classifies the Qur'an as a kind of Islamic Mishnah, a learned compilation by exegetes – is their indifference to the possibility that the Qur'an may be a mirror of an emerging religious community. What use can be made of these approaches once we dispense with their hermeneutic master key, with their preconceived Judeo-Christian or Christian point of departure? Even if we choose to question the Islamic tradition – as the revisionist scholars propose we ought to do – Qur'anic research is still faced with the task of establishing a meaningful relationship between the two great formative developments in the genesis of Islam: the emergence of a religious community and the production of a text possessing canonical authority, the transmitted Qur'an. The three scholars mentioned do not see the necessity of this task; they staunchly believe the Qur'an is not a text recording a new period of 'salvation history' (*Heilsgeschichte*), but rather a construct responding to the later requirements of the community or a transcription of older, 'original' texts undertaken to fulfil ideological agendas.

Yet even if we, as Qur'anic scholars, do not subscribe to either a secondary evolution of the Qur'an from an earlier corpus or to a later compilation of the Qur'an in southern Iraq, after Wansbrough's revolutionary claims we would hardly go back to the concept of Muhammad as the sole author, so to speak, of the Qur'an. While it is impossible to dispense with Islamic tradition (though it should always be critically evaluated), it cannot be the starting point for research – that can only be the text itself. Its communication structure, which has been too little examined so far, requires that we concentrate anew on the interaction between the messenger and his audience. As Sinai states, the Qur'anic texts in many respects document a process characterised by 'trial and error':

> They quote convictions, inquiries and objections from the audience, they experiment on both the level of content and form with various ways of appropriation and reply, on some of which a consensus is reached which allows them to be perpetuated, while others are not able to stand their ground. Consequently, one will have to consider the evolving community that subsequently transforms itself several times as passive co-authors of the

> text. [It is only] because Qur'anic texts were able to articulate and shape in a convincing way the education, expectations and experiences of their audience [that] they succeeded [in] assert[ing] themselves as the foundation documents of a community [that constituted] itself around them. Specifically Qur'anic forms of interpreting the world and their literary expression are thus rooted not only within the mind of the prophetic genius that was Muhammad, but were negotiated during communicative interaction between messenger and community. Muhammad did not 'absorb' elements of Judaism or Christianity, but in the cultural environment within which he was active, Jewish and Christian theological statements were debated, [and], in the course of their discussion within the community, were integrated into the Qur'anic text. Muhammad's role would consequently have been that of a catalyst and ultimate shaper [of the Qur'an] rather than an author in the traditional sense.[53]

The view of the Qur'an, still current in some circles, as a biographical source of Muhammad's life – analogous to the New Testament which is mined for information in the quest for the historical Jesus – will have to be reconsidered. It should not, however, be revised in the way advocated by Wansbrough, which strictly separates the text from the tradition data. While it is not advisable to look to Islamic tradition to understand all the episodes of the Prophet's life, it is indispensable and legitimate, as shown by Gregor Schoeler's and other scholars' Hadith criticism,[54] to refer to it for the basic data: the lifetime of the Prophet, the places of his activity, the *hijra*, the community's cohabitation with Jewish groups and its military activities in Medina. The aim is not, however, to trace Muhammad's inner evolution, but to elicit the successive discourses that were relevant to the emerging community during its gradual development.

Syriacist Scholarship in Qur'anic Studies

More recently, scholars have been interested in tracing the theological and stylistic resemblances between the Qur'an and Syriac homilies and poetic texts. This approach has been fruitfully applied in a seminal study by Joseph Witztum.[55] The author, who also pays attention to the narrative structures of both the probable model texts and their reworkings, is extremely careful to differentiate between Syriac intertexts and their Qur'anic reconfigurations; his microtextual investigations have disclosed important theological developments in the Qur'an that had hitherto gone unnoticed.[56] In contrast, though, most scholars concerned with Syriac material prefer to concentrate on the Syriac

traditions over the Qur'anic developments. Gabriel Said Reynolds, in particular, has written prolifically on Syriac–Qur'anic intertexts.[57] Several valuable and challenging findings are due to this new Syriacist approach,[58] yet it comes with two caveats. First, Syriacist scholars assert that the Qur'an should be interpreted without reference to traditional exegesis or the biography of the Prophet. These stipulations seem less due to methodological caution than to the intent to sever the Qur'an from its traditional frame in terms of time and space, that is, to turn it into a historically undetermined text in the Wansbroughian vein. This premise underlying Reynolds' research, and that of the Syriacist scholars at large, thus appears rather restrictive. It is true that in order to understand the Qur'an we ought not rely on the details of Muhammad's vita, about which, after all, we know very little and which, in its traditional shape, is widely the product of later communal imagination. What we do need to do, however, is to generate a working hypothesis about whether the Qur'anic speech was an oral proclamation addressed to a growing and probably changing audience (and thus a self-referential and open text) or an author's (or a collective's) compilation of earlier traditions of a conscious instructional or paraenetic intent (and thus a closed corpus). The relationship between the text and its 'subtext' in each case would be substantially different. If we assume the first case, that the Qur'an was proclaimed to Arabic speakers who were immersed in late antique thought, we would expect that these listeners would have continuously examined and questioned the earlier traditions to assess their relevance to the gradually evolving convictions of the new movement. The Qur'an viewed from this perspective emerges as a document of permanent reworkings of earlier ideas and theologoumena which create the tensions we find in the suras. If we, however, assume that the Qur'an was an anonymous compilation, a text which simply reused and partly absorbed older traditions, no intrinsic tensions are to be expected. Accordingly, such a reading draws the curtain on the literary character of the text, which is widely made up of dialectic argument and thus attests to a gradual evolution from a process of debate. To simply erase this alternative blurs the insight into the relation between text and the subtext.

Second, a philological selectiveness is evident in the Syriacist school's approach. Textual study of the Qur'an needs to be based on clearly defined methodological premises; yet the Syriacist scholars dispense with these conceptual preliminaries, thus leaving important traits of the Qur'an unexplained, such as: (a) the varying structure, length and complexity of the suras – traits that, according to philological research (precisely, lower criticism), result from their historical development, (b) the different functions that recurring motifs bear in their individual contexts – functions which,

according to philological research, are due to the gradually developing theological insights of the speaker and his audience, (c) the concentration of particular discourses within certain groups of suras and not others, which scholarship in genre criticism has traced back to the gradual development of Qur'anic genres.[59] Additionally, the Syriacist school fails to explain (d) the numerous additions found inserted in more than half of the suras of the corpus (as shown by lower criticism and redaction criticism[60]) which hardly make sense in an authorial, premeditated text. There is not only an obvious intertextuality, but also an intratextuality which can hardly be explained without the assumption that the Qur'an originated from a process of oral communication, that there was continuous feedback on the proclamation by the listeners which made these amendments mandatory. The Syriacist school might also have paid attention (e) to the unit of the sura, which was not an invention of Islamic tradition but was present in the most ancient extant manuscripts (as shown by redaction criticism). To try and accommodate these phenomena in a theoretically grounded concept of the Qur'anic text would surely be a demanding task, yet it is one which needs to be tackled. It would first require a thorough review of the prevailing presumption that there is something like a homogeneous unit called 'the Qur'an'. The Qur'an, on closer examination, is not a homogeneous text but a text containing a variety of sub-genres. These, however, can only be determined on the basis of a literary analysis that takes the formal and structural elements of the suras seriously. The broad view of the Qur'an as a homily reminiscent of Syriac models may be supported by particular sections of the text, but observed in its entirety the Qur'an is primarily a mantic text (i.e. one in which divination and prophecy are clearly foregrounded) and secondarily a dialectic (and hence also an exegetic) one, and thus hardly allows for such a general classification.

Its complex textual structure reveals that the Qur'an stemmed from a process of oral communication; it was not, from the start, a fixed text. The Syriacist scholars, who are concerned with 'the canonical text of the Qur'an' (i.e. the fixed form),[61] thus focus on a stage of the Qur'an's textual development that had been achieved only at a later period through the very agency that they most vehemently reject: Islamic tradition. It is, however, the pre-canonical text which addressed recipients educated in late antique thought and familiar with Biblical tradition. In contrast, the canonical text (the *muṣḥaf*) – presumed to have been fixed some decades after the death of the Prophet (in 11/632) – addressed a rapidly growing community of Muslim recipients whose background, as the most ancient commentaries clearly reveal, was substantially different from that of the earliest addressees and who, moreover, pursued new

aims, namely to theologically corroborate their status as a new identity group. We may speak here of two different discourses that generated two different avenues of hermeneutic. The first is the discourse of the pre-canonical Qur'an which still views the religious landscape of its pluricultural milieu as a familiar one, where one is free to subscribe to, debate or even reject the various views offered in the diverse religious traditions of Late Antiquity. In this early stage of the Qur'an's development, late antique religious views are considered common heritage – at least by denominationally uncommitted pagans or syncretists. There is no outright polemic against Jews or Christians in the Qur'an at this stage. This crops up only later, in the Medinan period, during the community's confrontation with the 'real heirs' of Biblical lore; here, the opinions of individual religious groups are quoted in order to be debated and often refuted. In contrast, the discourse surrounding the canonical Qur'an, found in the Prophet's biography as well as the exegetical literature, is based on an emerging elitist 'Islamic identity'. Here, the theology of the older religious traditions is no longer seen as a challenge, but is deemed inferior and even obsolete.

The fundamental difference between these discourses enables us to discern two strains of hermeneutic: an early integrative understanding of adjacent traditions, on the one hand, and a later dialectical/polemical approach to those traditions, on the other. Now, the canonical text, the *muṣḥaf*, is in its wording identical to the pre-canonical text. Yet its arrangement invites a synchronic reading which obscures the genetically distinct ideological positions mirrored in the diverse phases of the Qur'an's development. What results is an *a priori* assumption about the coexistence of responses to essentially different and historically distinct challenges. Scholars, such as those of the Syriacist school, who are seriously interested in the intertextuality of the Qur'an, in how the Qur'anic message not only resumes but responds to earlier traditions, therefore ought not immediately focus on the Islamic canonical text, the *muṣḥaf*, but should try to concentrate as much as possible on the late antique Qur'an proclamation, the pre-canonical text.

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At this point, it is worth taking a closer look at what information can be drawn from an examination of the canonical and the pre-canonical text of the Qur'an. This will provide a basis for the valorisation of Qur'anic scholarship from the 1970s onwards, and a deeper understanding of the fruitful areas of research for the future.

according to philological research, are due to the gradually developing theological insights of the speaker and his audience, (c) the concentration of particular discourses within certain groups of suras and not others, which scholarship in genre criticism has traced back to the gradual development of Qur'anic genres.[59] Additionally, the Syriacist school fails to explain (d) the numerous additions found inserted in more than half of the suras of the corpus (as shown by lower criticism and redaction criticism[60]) which hardly make sense in an authorial, premeditated text. There is not only an obvious intertextuality, but also an intratextuality which can hardly be explained without the assumption that the Qur'an originated from a process of oral communication, that there was continuous feedback on the proclamation by the listeners which made these amendments mandatory. The Syriacist school might also have paid attention (e) to the unit of the sura, which was not an invention of Islamic tradition but was present in the most ancient extant manuscripts (as shown by redaction criticism). To try and accommodate these phenomena in a theoretically grounded concept of the Qur'anic text would surely be a demanding task, yet it is one which needs to be tackled. It would first require a thorough review of the prevailing presumption that there is something like a homogeneous unit called 'the Qur'an'. The Qur'an, on closer examination, is not a homogeneous text but a text containing a variety of sub-genres. These, however, can only be determined on the basis of a literary analysis that takes the formal and structural elements of the suras seriously. The broad view of the Qur'an as a homily reminiscent of Syriac models may be supported by particular sections of the text, but observed in its entirety the Qur'an is primarily a mantic text (i.e. one in which divination and prophecy are clearly foregrounded) and secondarily a dialectic (and hence also an exegetic) one, and thus hardly allows for such a general classification.

Its complex textual structure reveals that the Qur'an stemmed from a process of oral communication; it was not, from the start, a fixed text. The Syriacist scholars, who are concerned with 'the canonical text of the Qur'an' (i.e. the fixed form),[61] thus focus on a stage of the Qur'an's textual development that had been achieved only at a later period through the very agency that they most vehemently reject: Islamic tradition. It is, however, the pre-canonical text which addressed recipients educated in late antique thought and familiar with Biblical tradition. In contrast, the canonical text (the *muṣḥaf*) – presumed to have been fixed some decades after the death of the Prophet (in 11/632) – addressed a rapidly growing community of Muslim recipients whose background, as the most ancient commentaries clearly reveal, was substantially different from that of the earliest addressees and who, moreover, pursued new

aims, namely to theologically corroborate their status as a new identity group. We may speak here of two different discourses that generated two different avenues of hermeneutic. The first is the discourse of the pre-canonical Qur'an which still views the religious landscape of its pluricultural milieu as a familiar one, where one is free to subscribe to, debate or even reject the various views offered in the diverse religious traditions of Late Antiquity. In this early stage of the Qur'an's development, late antique religious views are considered common heritage – at least by denominationally uncommitted pagans or syncretists. There is no outright polemic against Jews or Christians in the Qur'an at this stage. This crops up only later, in the Medinan period, during the community's confrontation with the 'real heirs' of Biblical lore; here, the opinions of individual religious groups are quoted in order to be debated and often refuted. In contrast, the discourse surrounding the canonical Qur'an, found in the Prophet's biography as well as the exegetical literature, is based on an emerging elitist 'Islamic identity'. Here, the theology of the older religious traditions is no longer seen as a challenge, but is deemed inferior and even obsolete.

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A Fixed Point in the History of the Qur'an: ʿAbd al-Malik's Imperial Project

Although it is unlikely that the argument between those who advocate that the Qur'an we have today is the text that existed in the time of Muhammad and those who challenge this view will be decided definitively, at the very least the hypothesis of a much later compilation of the Qur'an can hardly be maintained in view of the discovery of ancient Qur'an manuscripts in the Great Mosque in Sanaa in the 1970s. The manuscripts discovered there, which are only now being analysed, have brought to light fragments of the Qur'an that can be dated to as early as the reign of the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65/685–86/705). They have not yet been published and information about them is known only from brief reports.[62] Work presently being carried out by the Corpus Coranicum project, however, indicates that their textual form is essentially the same as that with which we are familiar.[63] These manuscripts receive their historical profile from unbiased witness documents from early Islamic literature which report ʿAbd al-Malik's initiative to unify the various Qur'anic traditions in use during his time into one codex that would be binding for Qur'anic readings.[64] It is true that the majority of Islamic tradition agrees that this step had already been taken by the third caliph, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (r. 23/644–34/655), who is credited with having redacted the Qur'an and publishing it officially around 29/650. While it seems unlikely that this date of publication can be proven, there are indicators that support such an earlier dating, in particular the transmitted accounts of conflicts between the Qur'anic readings linked to specific reciters from the Prophet's own circle, on the one hand, and the readings in the ʿUthmānic text, on the other. However, even if we assume, as does Alfred-Louis de Prémare,[65] the final redaction to have taken place later, during ʿAbd al-Malik's reign, the dating of the definitive Qur'an text still approaches the end of its textual production, that is, no more than sixty years after the death of the Prophet. Contrary to de Prémare's conclusions, this period of time is too short for there to have been decisive, theologically relevant modifications of the text, let alone the retrospective literary construction of an Arab myth of the Golden Age under the Prophet's rule. Furthermore, by this time, Islamic history was well under way, as is clear from the wars of expansion under ʿAbd al-Malik,[66] and Qur'anic texts were the subject of learned debates at his court. Omar Hamdan aptly labelled ʿAbd al-Malik's well-documented initiative to unify the writing of the Qur'an as part of an extensive imperial project which also included the Arabisation of the chancellery and the mint. The orthographic reform introduced into the compilation of the Qur'an under ʿAbd al-Malik's rule presupposes an already constituted mandatory text. To prove its historicity, we do not have to

rely on accounts alone, but can also refer to the traces of vocalisations and consonant distinctions found in the oldest dated version of Qur'anic verses preserved in ʿAbd al-Malik's inscription stretching over 240 metres in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, a building that was completed in 73/692. While the Qur'an seems at first to have been taught mainly orally in several centres of the empire, we cannot dismiss the assumption that it was given its definitive textual form and the extant ordering of the suras early on, maybe as early as 29/650 but at the latest by ʿAbd al-Malik around the turn of the first/seventh century.

Three Aspects Reflected by the Codex (*al-muṣḥaf*)

First: The transcript of a message

Of course, over twenty or indeed sixty years, individual verses may have been modified, added to or been lost from the Qur'an; above all, there is no guarantee that all of Muhammad's proclamations had been conserved. This is a grey area that will probably never be fully illuminated. There are a very small number of elliptical passages in the Qur'an which may have arisen from the omission of some elements of the text during its transmission. Uncanonical readings transmitted in certain ancient pre-ʿUthmānic text traditions show minor divergences.[67] It is also not completely impossible that the 'mysterious letters' (i.e. the initial 'ciphers' – *fawātiḥ* – made up of letter signs whose function is so far unknown) that precede a large number of suras are indications of an older editorial arrangement which cannot, however, be reconstructed. In any case, all these uncertainties in the transmission are rather insignificant. The key to understanding the Qur'an cannot be found by post-dating it or rewriting it according to Christian prototypes, as is repeatedly demanded by linguists or historians, but only through its literary analysis. The Qur'an is not a codified compilation of Biblical narratives, hymns, prayers and polemic–apologetic disputes; it is the transcript – partly immediately codified and partly recorded later from memory – of the interaction that took place between the messenger and his listeners, and culminated in the foundation of a community. Of course, then, the attempt to write the history of this interaction implies not just the historical observation of the Prophet as the messenger, but equally of the listeners who, like him, entered the text as protagonists in the debates.

Second: The 'management of the Prophet's literary estate'

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Second: The 'management of the Prophet's literary estate'

The doubts expressed by some scholars about the genuineness of the Qur'an are likely less the result of historical uncertainty than the helplessness they feel, as modern readers, when faced with the Qur'an's literary form. The

Qur'anic codex as it appears today is a collection of 114 individual texts (i.e. suras) whose arrangement does not follow any chronological or narrative order; nor does it reflect any theological concept of the kind on which the four Gospels are based, or a continuous narrative such as that found in the Pentateuch. Rather, the suras are arranged according to a remarkably mechanical criterion – their length, in descending order. This 'crude form' of the entire structure, however, fits poorly with the theory held by the sceptical scholars that the corpus was compiled by anonymous men of letters who, drawing on or inventing the sayings of a mythical Prophet, premeditated the creation of an Islamic foundation myth. The mechanistic presentation of the text would, furthermore, be surprising at the later date of collection proposed by the sceptical scholars as, by then, highly sophisticated textual compositions had become the rule. It would not, however, be surprising within the scenario suggested by Islamic tradition: the managing of the Prophet's 'literary estate' by 'Qur'an collectors', after his death. The heterogeneous masses of texts compiled by the redactors, from memory and from transcripts left by the Prophet's contemporaries, must be imagined as an unordered literary estate that had to be published as soon as possible. The ancient 'canonical provision' to neither add nor remove anything had been deeply engrained in the consciousness of the messenger, who often had found himself in the difficult situation of having to defend the integrity of his messages.[68] Thus, as the divine inspiration (*waḥy*) or the 'sending-down from God' (*tanzīlun min rabbi'l-'ālamīn*), the text was considered sacrosanct even during the Prophet's lifetime. Consequently, the redactors would have refrained from making any reference to themselves in the text or from providing any semantic explanation or chronological footnoting of passages; they thus did not leave instructions on how to read the text. Dispensing with readability was acceptable at the time of the Qur'an's codification; it was more urgent that the text be delimited authoritatively, and the arrangement and form of the individual suras be fixed.[69] The main medium of communicating the Qur'an, anyhow, remained that originally employed by Muhammad: oral recitation, kept alive through the remembrances of his Companions. Hence, the result of the first codification – which was, after all, a measure taken at the instigation of the state or at least a political authority – was not a continuously readable book like the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament. What emerged was a text of a quite different literary genre, one commensurate with the second meaning of the word *qur'ān* which, besides 'reading' or 'recitation', denotes a lectionary. The official Qur'an crystallised into a lectionary, a collection of pericopes from which texts for liturgical recitation might be selected.[70]

Third: Canonisation

A lectionary contains texts that form an essential part of a community's sacred practices. The Qur'an itself emphasises, in a unique manner, its liturgical function and, at the same time, its close link to other scriptures. William Graham points out that the acknowledgment of the existence of scriptures outside one's own religion, which emerged in Europe only in the nineteenth century, was always present in the Qur'an.[71] Innumerable verses refer to the scripture (*kitāb*) or the scriptures (*kutub*) of other religions, which the recited Qur'an similarly classifies itself as, even though during the lifetime of the Prophet it never took the shape of a written scripture.[72]

However much the Qur'an emphasises its essential kinship with the other scriptures, whose truth it affirms, according to Islamic theology it is unmistakeably the ultimate scripture that completes and perfects all others. Between the Qur'an's identification of itself as a scripture among other scriptures and the later theological interpretation of it as a scripture surpassing all others, a momentous development occurred: canonisation[73] – a decisive break in the perception of the Qur'an, changing it from a document of a divinely guided historical dialogue (i.e. of religious discussion with and about others) to a document of divine monologue. The canonical Qur'an was presented as the embodiment of divine speech so suggestively that it was possible for Western scholarship to propose the hypothesis of 'inlibration' (i.e. God's word becoming book), which was considered analogous to incarnation (the Christian belief of God's word becoming flesh).[74] Indeed, the impact of the canonisation of the text in combination with its communicator's absence can hardly be overestimated.

Canonisation, unlike mere official codification, not only serves to delimit a particular scriptural corpus, consequently excluding others, but also imposes a particular way of reading that is significantly distinct from the way other literary texts are read. Canonisation is not a quality immanent in the text but the result of a social recognition that imbues specific religious writings with an otherwise unknown authority and generates communal identity. This authority even devaluates chronometric time. As Aziz al-Azmeh shows,[75] the canonical Qur'an not only lays claim to eternal validity but is also structured in an ahistorical way. Canonisation reconfigured the text from a flow of speech determined by its time into a chain of timeless individual text units without beginning or end and replete with reiterated references to transcendence. A timeless perception of this kind is, of course, not surprising considering the ordering of the texts which is itself ahistorical. Canonisation erased the traces by which the reader might discern the evolution and emergence of the

units of the text over time and, instead, replaced them with a mythical timelessness.

Things are different, of course, outside the cultic realm: traditional Qur'anic studies (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*) comprises a number of disciplines that focus on historical issues, such as the occasions of revelations (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and the abrogation of texts in favour of others (*al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh*). One might equally argue that the *sīra* serves to embed a vast number of Qur'anic texts into a historically unfolding story. Yet, the difference between this kind of historical framing of texts and the scholarly historical investigations into the development of the text is hard to ignore: historical scholarship is less interested in the reconstruction of events than in the accommodation of diverse theological statements within a sequence of overarching theoretical discourses. Historical scholarship does not trace verses back to their social circumstances and functions (their *Sitz im Leben*) but to a particular theological or juridical debate which the Qur'anic texts seem to intervene in. This particular epistemic interest necessarily deviates from that of the *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* since it operates on the premise that essential theological statements of the Qur'an emerged from inter-communal discussion. The historical approach sheds new light on the various intellectual achievements that contributed to the genesis of the Qur'anic text.

Two Aspects Reflected by the Pre-canonical Text

First: The drama of theological interaction

We have to keep in mind that before the Qur'an was consolidated into a codex, and was canonised and thus de-historicised, it represented the transcript of a drama, the historical interaction between a charismatic leader and his community. In order to do justice to this interaction, which was so crucial in generating the text of the Qur'an, it is useful to look to the methodology from drama studies. Applying drama analysis, we must distinguish between two levels of communication in the Qur'an. One level – the interior one – is occupied by the protagonists of the immediate interaction drama, describable in historical terms, that takes place between Muhammad and his community of listeners. The other – the exterior – level is occupied by a divine speaker who directly addresses the Prophetic recipient and sometimes also his audience.

Of course, the pre-canonical Qur'an features almost entirely the divine voice speaking in the first person (singular or plural), addressing the Prophet in the 'you' voice. However, just like in an overheard telephone conversation, it

is not difficult to deduce from the one audible side what kind of situation the speaker is addressing. If all the players in this drama, including those from the lower level, are considered the text becomes many-voiced. Besides the directly addressed speaker, Muhammad, groups and individuals from among the audience become apparent, either because they are present or because they are discussed in their absence. The voices of these individuals and groups, in turn, are involved in debates which are not always fully unfolded, but without whose notice the novelty of the Qur'anic positions would escape us.

Let us look at three simple Qur'anic examples that indicate the negotiation of key religious concepts of Late Antiquity which resulted in their reformulation and adaptation to fit the theology of the nascent Islamic community. The first example focuses on the Qur'an's designation of Christ as 'Īsā ibn Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary). As other prophets are mentioned in the text without reference to their parental origins, Jesus would not really require such a reference either. It is obvious that what is presented here is the reformulation of the Christian title 'Jesus, son of God'. It is replaced with a term that sounds similar but attaches an entirely different status to Jesus; this manoeuvre would have been clearly recognisable to the audience. The Christian title would not only have been incompatible with the views of the rigorously monotheistic nascent Qur'anic community, it would also have established unmistakeable partisanship with the Christian faith. Once this title had been expunged and its reinterpretation signalled to the listeners, it was easy for Jesus to be placed on an equal footing with all other Biblical prophets. Thus, this particular reference to Jesus allows us to trace an important instant within the history of the emergence of the Qur'anic text.

The second example concerns the guarded tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) mentioned in Q. 85:22. Unlike the Hebrew Bible and other texts of Jewish tradition, the Qur'an does not refer to two tablets written or dictated by God exclusively for the covenant with Moses; rather, it speaks of one single tablet preserved in heaven that bears the text of the prophetic revelations.[76] This tablet has been preserved in heaven, its text never having been exposed to human interference, and is thus universally authoritative. Unlike in Jewish tradition, no single religious group is to be privileged with revelation, but rather all people, universally, are seen as its addressees.

The final example concerns the Qur'anic creed in *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q. 112). The first verse, *Say, He is God, One* (*qul huwa'llāhu aḥad*, Q. 112:1), renders into Arabic the Jewish creed, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord' (*Shemaʿ Yisra'el, adonay elohenu adonay eḥad*, Deuteronomy 6:4), whose key word '*eḥad*' ('*aḥad*' in Arabic vocalisation) still resounds in the Qur'anic passage. This still audible quotation, which distinctly crosses linguistic

boundaries, exposes the difference between the two creeds which is achieved through the new emphasis on its universal validity. As the replacement of the address, 'Hear, O Israel', specifying a particular group, with the undetermined 'Say' ('*qul*') clearly attests, the Qur'anic text addresses all human beings; it has changed a creed of national faith into a universal one.[77]

Unless connections like these are made between Qur'anic concepts and those of their predecessors, the innovative dimension of the Qur'an will remain unrecognised. Anyone who reads the Qur'an as a canonical text, as the founding document of an already established, exclusivist religion, may well regard it as unnecessary to pay much attention to the long-past Prophetic politics of universalisation documented in the text. The critical scholar, however, needs to recognise the discursive strategies which render the new Qur'anic positions transparent.

Unlike the canonical codex, the pre-canonical Qur'an must be understood as the documentation of a communication process, as an ensemble of texts which arose from the publicly, or at least audibly, proclaimed recitation (i.e. *qur'ān*) – the Prophet's reading from a celestial template.[78] Not only did the Prophet undergo development as an individual, so too did the debate in his community. There began to emerge, among the audience, a consensus regarding individual messages, so that upon repeated recitation, these messages did not need to be justified or evaluated anew but could rely on the already attained consensus. An example would be the figure of Satan, who is at first depicted as being many-faceted and ambivalent but later becomes an unequivocally negative figure.[79] This consensus, once, reached exempted the communicator from needing to rationalise the message to the community. However, as the community kept growing and, in Medina, as the audience occasionally included Jewish listeners, some of the texts for recitation did require later revision. This is why, in many cases, the depiction of episodes from Jewish salvation history was subsequently expanded or revised, generating what is known as the Medinan additions. An example of this is evident in the story of the golden calf in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* (Q. 20) which adds an interpreting point inspired by the Jewish atonement liturgy, as will be shown further on.[80]

In attempting to visualise the individual acts of this drama, it is worthwhile dividing the textual corpus heuristically into three Meccan phases (early, middle and later Meccan) and one Medinan phase, as outlined by Nöldeke in his Geschichte des Qorans, and indicating the developments that took place in these periods which cemented the foundation of the Qur'anic community. This division does not refer to unequivocal chronological text sequences but to text clusters linked typologically and by common discourses.

Second: The emergence of a community

The early Meccan period

The first Meccan period according to Nöldeke comprises the suras Q. 51–3, Q. 55–6, Q. 69, Q. 70, Q. 73, Q. 75, Q. 77–83, Q. 85–102, Q. 104–9, Q. 111–14; essentially, though not exactly, constituting the 'last thirtieth' (*al-juz' al-thalāthūn*) of the Qur'an, suras which to this day are deemed most suitable for use in oral, ritual prayer.[81] The suras included in the early Meccan period and their sequence established by Nöldeke have more recently been revisited and modified. They can be classified under four groups and arranged as follows:[82]

I: Q. 93–4, Q. 97, Q. 108, Q. 105–106, Q. 102, Q. 107, Q. 111, Q. 104, Q. 103, Q. 99, Q. 100–101, Q. 95;
II: Q. 89, Q. 91–2, Q. 90, Q. 87, Q. 96, Q. 82, Q. 81, Q. 84, Q. 86, Q. 85;
III: Q. 73–4, Q. 80, Q. 79, Q. 75, Q. 70, Q. 78, Q. 88, Q. 83, Q. 77;
IV: Q. 51, Q. 69, Q. 68, Q. 55–6, Q. 53, Q. 52.

The suras of this period, particularly of groups I to III, are mostly short texts, at first dealing with only a single subject but successively becoming polythematic. The suras of group I, especially, present divine consolations and encouragements granted to the persona of the messenger, who is continuously addressed in the second person. Apart from the divergent form of address, the message is expressed in a style very similar to that of the psalms, which are paraphrased again and again.[83] This partial corpus, which scholars had for a long time regarded as containing biographical details of the Prophet's personal life, can now be identified as the psalm-inspired document of a new and genuinely Arab liturgy. The early suras are far more text-referential than biographical or historical, particularly as the speaker–listener setting that was to become predominant in the later suras is not yet always explicit. To the same early period belongs a cluster of suras that project the Day of Judgement – their metaphors frequently recalling the revelation of St John, though without messianic implications – as a vision of the future that is menacingly close, and under whose pressure the perception of time has been readjusted from cyclical to linear. In this conception, time stretches backwards to the very beginnings, before measurable human time, to the creation of the world and the first message from God; and it stretches forward to the very end, after the conclusion of human time, to the dissolution of creation and the Day of Judgement. This new theological concept of linear time (which was the product of community consensus but not yet authoritative doctrine), in which everything is oriented towards the final calling to account, imbued every human action with a new ethical dimension. In these 'eschatological suras',

boundaries, exposes the difference between the two creeds which is achieved through the new emphasis on its universal validity. As the replacement of the address, 'Hear, O Israel', specifying a particular group, with the undetermined 'Say' ('*qul*') clearly attests, the Qur'anic text addresses all human beings; it has changed a creed of national faith into a universal one.[77]

Unless connections like these are made between Qur'anic concepts and those of their predecessors, the innovative dimension of the Qur'an will remain unrecognised. Anyone who reads the Qur'an as a canonical text, as the founding document of an already established, exclusivist religion, may well regard it as unnecessary to pay much attention to the long-past Prophetic politics of universalisation documented in the text. The critical scholar, however, needs to recognise the discursive strategies which render the new Qur'anic positions transparent.

Unlike the canonical codex, the pre-canonical Qur'an must be understood as the documentation of a communication process, as an ensemble of texts which arose from the publicly, or at least audibly, proclaimed recitation (i.e. *qur'ān*) – the Prophet's reading from a celestial template.[78] Not only did the Prophet undergo development as an individual, so too did the debate in his community. There began to emerge, among the audience, a consensus regarding individual messages, so that upon repeated recitation, these messages did not need to be justified or evaluated anew but could rely on the already attained consensus. An example would be the figure of Satan, who is at first depicted as being many-faceted and ambivalent but later becomes an unequivocally negative figure.[79] This consensus, once, reached exempted the communicator from needing to rationalise the message to the community. However, as the community kept growing and, in Medina, as the audience occasionally included Jewish listeners, some of the texts for recitation did require later revision. This is why, in many cases, the depiction of episodes from Jewish salvation history was subsequently expanded or revised, generating what is known as the Medinan additions. An example of this is evident in the story of the golden calf in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* (Q. 20) which adds an interpreting point inspired by the Jewish atonement liturgy, as will be shown further on.[80]

In attempting to visualise the individual acts of this drama, it is worthwhile dividing the textual corpus heuristically into three Meccan phases (early, middle and later Meccan) and one Medinan phase, as outlined by Nöldeke in his *Geschichte des Qorans*, and indicating the developments that took place in these periods which cemented the foundation of the Qur'anic community. This division does not refer to unequivocal chronological text sequences but to text clusters linked typologically and by common discourses.

Second: The emergence of a community

The early Meccan period

The first Meccan period according to Nöldeke comprises the suras Q. 51–3, Q. 55–6, Q. 69, Q. 70, Q. 73, Q. 75, Q. 77–83, Q. 85–102, Q. 104–9, Q. 111–14; essentially, though not exactly, constituting the 'last thirtieth' (*al-juz' al-thalāthūn*) of the Qur'an, suras which to this day are deemed most suitable for use in oral, ritual prayer.[81] The suras included in the early Meccan period and their sequence established by Nöldeke have more recently been revisited and modified. They can be classified under four groups and arranged as follows:[82]

I: Q. 93–4, Q. 97, Q. 108, Q. 105–106, Q. 102, Q. 107, Q. 111, Q. 104, Q. 103, Q. 99, Q. 100–101, Q. 95;
II: Q. 89, Q. 91–2, Q. 90, Q. 87, Q. 96, Q. 82, Q. 81, Q. 84, Q. 86, Q. 85;
III: Q. 73–4, Q. 80, Q. 79, Q. 75, Q. 70, Q. 78, Q. 88, Q. 83, Q. 77;
IV: Q. 51, Q. 69, Q. 68, Q. 55–6, Q. 53, Q. 52.

The suras of this period, particularly of groups I to III, are mostly short texts, at first dealing with only a single subject but successively becoming polythematic. The suras of group I, especially, present divine consolations and encouragements granted to the persona of the messenger, who is continuously addressed in the second person. Apart from the divergent form of address, the message is expressed in a style very similar to that of the psalms, which are paraphrased again and again.[83] This partial corpus, which scholars had for a long time regarded as containing biographical details of the Prophet's personal life, can now be identified as the psalm-inspired document of a new and genuinely Arab liturgy. The early suras are far more text-referential than biographical or historical, particularly as the speaker–listener setting that was to become predominant in the later suras is not yet always explicit. To the same early period belongs a cluster of suras that project the Day of Judgement – their metaphors frequently recalling the revelation of St John, though without messianic implications – as a vision of the future that is menacingly close, and under whose pressure the perception of time has been readjusted from cyclical to linear. In this conception, time stretches backwards to the very beginnings, before measurable human time, to the creation of the world and the first message from God; and it stretches forward to the very end, after the conclusion of human time, to the dissolution of creation and the Day of Judgement. This new theological concept of linear time (which was the product of community consensus but not yet authoritative doctrine), in which everything is oriented towards the final calling to account, imbued every human action with a new ethical dimension. In these 'eschatological suras',

the divine speaker does not explicitly introduce himself and thereby provide them with the stamp of authority; rather, they make use of authorisation strategies known from pre-Islamic mantic language. Thus they use clusters of oaths which invoke natural phenomena interspersed with rhythmical flashes of the apocalypse that make full use of the magic power of linguistic repetitions.[84] The instances of poetic intertextuality should not be ignored in these suras: not only do the early images of paradise display a reversed image of the *aṭlāl* (deserted encampments),[85] a common image found in the *qaṣīda*, but the exemplification of divine justice through God's destruction of the *umam khāliya*, the bygone communities, should be understood as a response to and an inversion of the pre-Islamic poet's lament about the ruinous state of his familiar landscape.[86]

Given the imminence of the Day of Judgement, the early Meccan suras not only call for ethical behaviour but for ritual observance as well. In them, day and night are structured by sacred periods which are reserved for prayer, periods often invoked in introductory passages. However, the most important innovation concerning the understanding of time is the introduction of eschatological prophecies, which are numerous in the early Meccan suras. These prophecies usually occur at the beginning of the suras and are occasionally introduced by oath clusters which evoke eschatological scenes.[87] The series of oaths do not fulfil the same function as Biblical oath formulas, the latter invoking the authority of a supernatural power outside of the text. In contrast, the claim to validity expressed by the early suras is based on an internal authority which arises from its poetical language rather than a theological conception. Eschatological prophecies may equally be introduced by short *idhā*-phrase ('on that day when . . .') series, which also have the Day of Judgement as their subject. There are a few instances in which the *idhā* phrases are not limited to natural or cosmic phenomena but also refer to preparations for the Day of Judgement, such as erecting the throne, blowing the trumpets and opening the register books. These are followed by a phrase of the type '[on that day when . . .,] there will be . . .' which illustrates what man's behaviour will be in the eschatological scenario and highlights that the saved will be separated from the damned. Descriptions of the other world follow, and these are clearly divided into two contrasting parts. The subdivisions are introduced by stereotypical formulas, such as '*fa-ammā . . . wa-ammā . . .*' ('as for those who . . . they will . . . but as for those who . . . they will . . .') or '*wujūhun . . . wujūhun . . .*' ('faces on that day will . . . other faces on that day will . . .'), which differentiate between the situation of the faithful in the garden of paradise, and that of the unbelievers and sinners in the fires of hell. It is noticeable that both scenarios show a wealth of metaphors that create a two-sided picture of

the other world; they also have either the same number of verses or proportional numbers of verses.[88] Seen in this way, they recall the opposing images of the two scenes of the afterworld in Christian iconography, thus, it does not seem too far-fetched to call them diptychs. These diptychs often include recollections of human behaviour on earth, the catalogues of virtues and catalogues of vices, which are introduced to justify the different fates in the beyond.

Of whom did the audience of the early suras consist? Islamic tradition, which imagines the pre-Islamic period as a time of barbarism or ignorance, depicts the audience as mostly pagan but allows for the inclusion of a few pious men shaped and distinguished by Christian faith and knowledge. It is true that the observance of the Kaaba rites documented in the early suras and Medinan texts indicates an audience that probably was not entirely adverse to the inherited cult. The linguistic situation (i.e. the great number of terms from the Christian liturgy and religion found in the suras), however, points to a very close connection with Christian culture.[89] While the hypothesis, propounded by Lüling in 1974 and Luxenberg in 2000, that Qur'anic texts had a Christian origin is methodologically unsubstantiated, it does raise awareness about the frequently underestimated dimension of the Christian cultural presence in the urban centres of the Arabian peninsula.[90] Contrary to Luxenberg's assumption, this Christian imprint on the Arabic language seems to have been already widespread before the Qur'anic communication, and thus appears not to have originated with it. It is therefore possible to presume that the earliest audience was indeed shaped by monotheistic thought, but did not immediately accept such essential theologoumena as the Day of Judgement, let alone incarnation which was never integrated into the community's doctrine. Many a reference to ancient Arabic poetry proves that there was a close attachment to the pagan Arabic literary heritage as well, not least because the idea of a supernatural inspiration itself, through its very designation '*waḥy*' (inspiration), refers back to ancient Arabic perceptions.[91]

The later Meccan period: Development of communal prayer

Unlike the earlier texts, the later Meccan texts firmly base their validity in an extra-textual authority.[92] This new referentiality can be discerned most clearly in the changed function of Qur'anic narratives. A cultic shift must have occurred and evidence of this is seen in the middle Meccan *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*. This sura provides the first indication of the existence of a particular kind of worship, labelled *qur'ān*, meaning 'reading', 'recitation': *Alif Lām Rā. Those are the signs of the* [*Scripture*] *and of a* [*clear reading/recitation*] (*Alif lām rā, tilka āyātu'l-kitābi wa-qur'ānin mubīn*, Q. 15:1). It reflects a new type of sura, one within which the reciting of scripture (*kitāb*) forms the most important part.[93]

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Neither this recitation nor its Qur'anic frame, however, covers the entire cultic ceremony, which is instead complemented – as the same text indicates – by a communal prayer, the *Fātiḥa*, evoked in Q. 15:87. The retelling of Biblical stories within the suras in the later Meccan stage seems to have assumed a prominent liturgical function. Considering the growing interest of the emerging community in including the Biblical heritage as part of their monotheistic identity, it is not surprising that the main body of the middle Meccan and late Meccan suras, which had developed into longer prose texts, appears to reflect a monotheistic service. They begin with an introductory section, which is either dialogical or appellative, entailing either apologetic/polemical/paraenetic arguments or hymns, and conclude with a section affirming the truth of the Qur'anic message as revelation. These framing passages have been compared to *ecteniae*, the introductory or concluding responsories which are recited by a deacon during the church liturgy and are responded to by the community.[94] However, the middle section of the monotheistic service and, similarly, that of the fully evolved middle Meccan suras is occupied by Biblical recollections: in the case of the Jewish/Christian service, this is a Biblical *qeri'ah/lectio*, a ceremonial recitation; in the case of the sura, it is a narrative from the Biblical inventory. The perusal of scripture in the liturgy, which evolved in Judaism and Christianity, became a model for the Qur'anic community's own practice of worship and, consequently, influenced the construction of their identity. This was the point at which the community made its 'transition from a society [based on] ritual coherence to [one based on] textual coherence', that is, its identity was no longer founded on pre-Islamic rituals but on scripture.[95]

The later Meccan suras often label their narratives as '(elements of the) scripture'. This scripture is represented as immutable and all-encompassing; it presupposes that the flow of the generation of knowledge has come to a standstill and has now crystallised into what may be considered an archive of knowledge. The references to this scripture consequently take as a given the existence of a fundamental store of narratives in a fixed heavenly writing and their sending down to the recipients in segments constituting clearly delimited pericopes fit to be embedded in a more extensive Qur'an recitation. At first, these communications from the heavenly scripture were clearly distinguished from less universal elements in the text (such as debates about ephemeral problems of the community) and marked by particular introductory formulas, such as: *And mention in the scripture . . .* (*wa'dhkur fī'l-kitāb . . .* , Q. 19:16). It was not until later, in the Medinan period, that the particular form of the message given to the community was itself regarded as creating scripture; that is, once the concerns of the Qur'anic community came to be seen as part of an

emerging Muslim salvation history, the entire suras figured as manifestations of the scripture, *kitāb*.

The majority of the later Meccan suras begins with an emphatic invocation of scripture, often introduced by a cipher consisting of a single letter or a combination of letters – most probably a reference to the smallest elements of the heavenly scripture – not found in the earlier suras. This incipit appears to indicate the newly attained ritual function of the recited text, which no longer presents itself as the immediate communication of a divine message to the Prophet and the community but as the recital from the heavenly scripture that is deemed to be pre-existing and can only be realised through oral recitation. With the reorientation of the direction of prayer, the *qibla*, away from Mecca and towards a distant sanctuary, Jerusalem – the 'furthest' temple, *al-masjid al-aqṣā* referred to in Q. 17:1[96] – prayer (*ṣalāt*) itself, which previously had been merely part of the syncretistic ritual probably performed at the Kaaba, acquires a new importance. This prayer ritual is introduced by the new communal prayer of the *Fātiḥa*, a text often invoked in the middle Meccan suras.

Thus, in the middle and late Meccan suras, the message is embedded in a new spatial frame. These texts contain a number of Biblical narratives that serve to extend the horizons of the audience. It transports them, in an imaginary journey, to a faraway landscape, the Holy Land, and thereby familiarises them with the historical space of the Israelites, whom they had adopted as their spiritual ancestors. The introduction of the *qibla* towards Jerusalem is unmistakeable evidence of the universal change of spatial orientation within the community.[97] It took place when, by refocusing the Biblical heritage, the horizons of the nascent community had begun to expand in both time and space. One might claim that the Jerusalem *qibla* was the physical expression of the community's attainment of new spiritual horizons. Two essential features, then, created the new self-image of the early Qur'anic community as the recipients and bearers of scripture, and, consequently, participants in an extended course of salvation history: the newly achieved convergence of the Qur'anic message with the earlier scriptures and the parallel acceptance of the *topographia sacra* (sacred geography) of the earlier religions. Through its very orientation, the *qibla* directed towards Jerusalem indicates this new liaison between the emerging community and the older religions. It is not surprising that the conception of the Meccan sanctuary and its rites as warrants of the community's coherence, which are apparent in the introductory parts of the early Meccan suras, is replaced in later Meccan suras by references to scripture, which is now acknowledged as being the most significant shared possession of the community. Spiritual space has thus superseded geographical space.

While the early Meccan suras referred to Mecca, and the deserted places of Arabia, in the later Meccan suras up to the *hijra*, Mecca is not mentioned anymore, except in Q. 17:1 where, however, the reference to the local sanctuary there, *al-masjid al-ḥarām*, is immediately juxtaposed against the sanctuary in Jerusalem, *al-masjid al-aqṣā*. Instead, the later Meccan suras focus on the Holy Land as a space where the oppressed believer can take refuge in prayer, as a *lieu de mémoire* (place of memory) where most of the prophets had been active. Suras from this time culminate in the frequently repeated exhortation for the emerging community to follow examples stretching back far into the history, not of their genealogical ancestors but of their spiritual ancestors, the Israelites. Jerusalem, represented by its sanctuary, is the centre of the space sanctified by the Israelites' scripture and thus closely connected to divine writing. All the prayers – those of the Jewish and those of the Qur'anic community alike – gravitate towards Jerusalem as their natural destination.

The Medinan period: Development of a communal service

The suras of the Medinan period (Q. 2–5, Q. 8–9, Q. 22, Q. 24, Q. 33, Q. 47–49, Q. 57–64, Q. 66, Q. 98, Q. 110) not only abandon the tripartite composition of the Meccan suras but also display less elaborate structural types. One of these types of suras could summarily be described as 'oratory suras' (Q. 22, Q. 24, Q. 33, Q. 47–49, Q. 57–64, Q. 66); these texts directly address the community using formulas such as *O men . . .* (*yā ayyuhā'l-nās . . .*, Q. 22:1). In these suras, some of which are introduced by hymnal formulas that strongly recall the psalms (Q. 59, Q. 61, Q. 62, Q. 64), Muhammad is no longer merely the communicator of a message but is addressed by God specifically as *al-nabī* (the Prophet), with the formula 'O Prophet' (*yā ayyuhā'l-nabī*).[98] The perception conveyed by these suras is that Muhammad is working in synergy with the deity, for he is referred to in conjunction with God, as in *God and His Messenger* (*Allāh wa rasūluhu*, Q. 59:4).

Unlike these mostly monothematic Medinan suras of medium length which resemble sermons, the great mass of Medinan texts is more complex. Most of these long suras (Q. 2–5, Q. 8–9) cannot be described as structured compositions in the way that the Meccan suras can; rather, they appear to be the result of a process of collection which has not as yet been reconstructed. With the appearance of the long sura there arose, for the first time, a discrepancy between the unit 'sura' and the 'reading' destined to be orally chanted in a ritual setting. It is obvious that the Medinan suras are too long to have fit into a single performance of recitation; thus it seems that they did not have a ritual function. For the ritual of the *ṣalāt*, the short suras or groups of verses of the Meccan texts were sufficient, whereas for the communal service,

the sermon-like 'oratory sura' of the Medinan period was more suitable. This tells us that, by this time, the community's need for a complex form of liturgical speech revolving around a recollection of salvation history had abated and was replaced with the demand for disparate polythematic, prophetic sermons, a new genre, which could be drawn upon to convey points related to legislation to the community. With this move towards a simpler form, the course for the erosion of the literary form of the sura was set: once it became possible to cull individual sections from the longer suras without seeming to compromise the text, it was only a short step to it being permissible for any believer to select arbitrary shorter passages from the longer suras for recitation during prayer. This practice may or may not date back to the time of the Prophet; however, in the compromised form of the long sura, the Qur'an contains within itself the formula for the dissolution of its own sura compositions.[99]

Medinan suras reflect a spiritual movement opposite to that found in the later Meccan texts. Not only has the *qibla* moved from Jerusalem, the spiritual home of the Israelites, back to Mecca (Q. 2:143–5), the land of the Arabs, but the importance placed on the remembrance of Moses and the exodus of his people has gradually faded. Thus, there is room now for remembrance of the figure of Abraham whose foundation of the Meccan sanctuary and initiation of the Kaaba rites established a new paradigm of salvation history for the emerging Muslim community. In this paradigm, Muhammad is seen as completing the work begun by Abraham, granting Mecca (and its associated ancient rites) the status it required to contest Jerusalem's primacy as the holy city of monotheism. The prayer for the consecration of the Kaaba in Q. 2:127–9, which is clearly an alternative rendering of Solomon's prayer for the consecration of the temple in I Kings 8:22–34, confirms Mecca's honorific as 'the holy place of prayer' (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*).

Mecca has now become the site of the Muslim pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), an institution that harks back to Abraham. Abraham, who was the first of the great prophets and who, most importantly, was active before the Mosaic legislation, is celebrated in the Medinan suras as the paragon of the monotheists. He is referred to as a *ḥanīf*[100] – a follower of the original and true religion, a 'just one from among the pagans' – whose successor, Muhammad, is described as a *nabī ummī*[101] – a prophet from among the non-Jewish, heathen peoples (e.g. see Q. 7:157). Abraham, who, in Genesis 17:1–15, introduced circumcision (Hebrew, *millah*) as a sign of the covenant between himself (and his descendants) and God, reappears in the Qur'an as the guarantor of a faith founded on a covenant called *millat Ibrāhīm* (Abraham's covenant). The new community that adheres to the faith of Abraham represents itself as possessing

a new religion (*dīn*). A visible sign of this religion is not least the fasting (*ṣawm*)[102] in the month of Ramadan – which commemorates the community's privilege at being sent a scripture of their own, as is made clear by the reasons given already in the early sura, *Sūrat al-Qadr* (Q. 97:1–5), for the institution of the *laylat al-qadr* (the night of power, i.e. the night during Ramadan when, it is believed, the recitation was sent down).

* * *

The Methodology of the *Studien*

Now, turning back to our survey of Qur'anic scholarship in the West, it may appear odd to refer to a work dating back to nearly forty years ago. However, such a review is justified by the fact that the methodology proposed there has, until now, found few followers. The *Studien* was completed in 1976,[103] a period when Qur'anic studies, on the whole, accepted the framework set by Islamic tradition, and approached the Qur'an as a textual corpus composed between 610 and 632 in Mecca and Medina. At the time, the genesis of the text was optimistically assumed to be easily reconstructable and the text in particular was seen in close connection with the person of the Prophet. In focusing on the Qur'an's text as a work of literature, though, the *Studien* diverged from the path pursued by Qur'anic studies.

The *Studien* followed the methodological steps which were, at that time, customary in Biblical studies.[104] Based on manuscript evidence and formal considerations, both of which indicated that the sura was a pre-canonical entity, the sura was chosen as the primary subject of the *Studien*'s examination. Starting with the premise that a sura must first be interpreted as a self-contained text, the following methodological steps were applied: literary criticism (lower criticism) to examine the uniformity of the sura and form criticism to discern the ensemble of the sura's functional and ornamental forms. Next, a comparison was made of a grouping of suras using genre criticism in order to draw conclusions about the existence of one or several shared genres within the Qur'anic corpus. Finally, the entire corpus would have to be examined using redaction criticism to uncover traces of the redaction – this methodological step could not, of course, have been undertaken systematically in the *Studien*.

These methods had, until then, not been pursued in Qur'anic studies. In the *Studien* they were applied to the Meccan suras, which constitute very nearly half the corpus. The first two steps had to take precedence over the last two, since the Qur'anic text demanded a separate treatment of the unit 'verse'. In

the Qur'an, in contrast to most Biblical writing, verses are the smallest constituents whose exact delimitation matters for the evaluation of the sura's literary form. It was therefore an important step in literary criticism to check the delimitation of the verses transmitted not only in the printed standard version but in the *ʿadd al-āy* (the counting of the verses) literature, and to describe the exceedingly heterogeneous rhyme patterns of the Qur'anic verses. It is necessary to identify the rhyme patterns before drawing conclusions about the delimitation of individual verses and their connections to each other. These conclusions, in turn, were required to uncover possibly intended proportions of verse groups, such information potentially being of relevance in genre criticism when seeking to determine individual types of suras.

Since the categorical rejection of Müller's sensational hypothesis of 1896 that the suras were based on strophic compositions,[105] the possibility that there had been a 'firm hand' controlling the composition and structure of individual suras was dismissed within scholarly circles in Germany. In response to this position, the *Studien* – through microstructural analysis of the Qur'an based on the methods of Biblical scholarship – endeavoured to prove that not only are there structures in the suras but that they reflect historical developments.

Preceding Qur'anic research did not acknowledge that the sura in its entirety (i.e. as a literary unit) was a worthwhile subject of research.[106] Though in older Qur'anic research a few studies dealing with individual suras do exist,[107] it is only recently that these have become more frequent.[108] Thus, a reader using extant Western commentaries will not learn anything about the significance of any one sura within the entire corpus, let alone about its *Sitz im Leben*. Ultimately, based on the Western philological literature on the Qur'an, the Qur'anic corpus appears to the untrained eye to consist of an amorphous set of verses with no recognisable rationale of their own. This image is reminiscent of the traditional Islamic perception of the text as the self-contained, homogeneous word of God – a perception which does not assign much value to the unit of the sura either. In the Muslim view, of course, the Qur'an acquires meaningfulness and, moreover, semantic clarity through the exegetical works and the Prophetic biography complementing it. However, in view of the Western scepticism vis-à-vis these traditional texts – which, in many cases, are chronologically remote from the Qur'an anyway – the text appears to disintegrate irreparably. Consequently, positing the sura, supported as it is by textual history,[109] as a heuristic unit of composition is imperative for any form of critical examination.

Three Issues that are Still Controversial

First: The sura as a compositional unit and the process of growth of the corpus

It is true, even in the case of the most recent research, that suras are hardly ever read in relation to each other.[110] This fact cannot be fully explained by the transmitted structure of the Qur'an corpus, where suras which are related to each other, either genetically or through shared discourse, are not usually found next to each other and do not form a recognisable sub-corpus. In the corpus of the psalms, related texts are not always found next to each other either, but, even so, a spirited debate as to which psalms constitute a sub-corpus has grown up around the psalter.[111] Consequently, the fact that there are almost no studies on groups of suras in Qur'anic studies remains vexing. The textual growth – which, from a historical-critical view, is an indispensable hermeneutical principle – is thus systematically suppressed. Furthermore, scholars' readiness to dispense with a synoptic observation of the suras betrays a narrow perspective unsuited to the task of comprehending the Qur'an as the reflection of a process of oral communication. It is no wonder, then, that the Qur'an in its extant form may appear to some readers to be an unshaped archive of isolated suras whose sequential development and interconnectedness is not immediately recognisable. The sequence in which the suras emerged must be reconstructed if we are to understand their intertextual, multilayered character. While there has been sporadic work to this end since Nöldeke, it yet remains for the Qur'an to be taken more seriously as the virtual mirror of the communication between the community and the speaker, and for the genetic sequence of the suras to be re-established.

In its aims to understand individual suras not as isolated units but as part of a whole and to reconstruct their sequence, redaction criticism is closely related to the canonical approach that has been advocated in American Bible studies since the 1970s.[112] The canonical approach understands the canon to be the result of a process of growth. In this context, canonical status derives from 'a consciousness deeply rooted within the scripture itself of its binding character [which is] in turn affirmed by the processes of continuous updating and intertextuality reflected in the scripture'.[113] The canonical approach was introduced into German Biblical studies by Christoph Dohmen and Manfred Oeming, who explain that:

> Even though the . . . canonical process comes to a conclusion with the end of textual growth, the final form of scripture is neither free from tension nor does it level the characteristics of grown texts. All the final form does, is

> move the locus of interpretation. While until that point it took place as productive updating or redaction within the text, from then on it takes place as comment and exegesis next to or accompanying this text.[114]

Unlike the case of the psalms, the main concern with the Qur'an is not to reclaim a convincingly intelligible arrangement of the corpus, since such a corpus was never realised in written form anyway, but to arrange a corpus of suras according to their historical succession. The most important aim of the reconstruction of the chronology of the Qur'an is to achieve an understanding of the suras that complies with the demands of literary studies. Wansbrough already pointed out that the suras entail a wealth of intertextuality, but Qur'anic intertextuality should not be taken as referring exclusively to extra-Qur'anic texts originating in Biblical tradition. On the contrary, the Qur'an, as emphasised by Navid Kermani – the most recent scholar to have taken up arms in defence of the Qur'an's essentially poetic nature – 'is a highly self-referential text, a text reflecting itself in many passages, commenting on itself, discussing its own linguistic form – more than any other scripture in the history of world religions'.[115]

Qur'anic research is thus faced with a task closely related to that of psalm research. The latter type of research conducts a 'poetic analysis' of the psalms which, as Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger describe it, 'makes use of the approaches of structural literary studies, of aesthetic stylistics and rhetoric, but also of the study of motifs and symbols in order to comprehend as fully as possible the diverse structures of images and communications, but in particular the ornamental and structural form of a psalm'.[116] In the Qur'an's case, a particular manifestation of intertextuality plays an additional role. It is only by establishing the intra-Qur'anic subtexts – which will emerge through chronological analysis – that it will be possible to fully comprehend each individual sura. Reconstructing the chronology of the suras is thus a desideratum of literary studies.

Second: Qur'anic studies vs. Qur'an-cum-*tafsīr* studies

Although to this day there has been no systematic examination of the Medinan suras,[117] it is by now possible to draw a summary picture of them as both organic continuations of the Meccan literary model and as textual departures from the Meccan literary model, since they are building on text traditions of Late Antiquity which had not been considered in the Meccan period. For the project of studying the Medinan suras, the model of the *Studien*, which makes only sparing use of details from the *sīra*, will have to be retained. This exegetical 'super-text', which has accompanied Islamic readings of the Qur'an

since the second/eighth century, in view of its theological and salvation-historical implications, ought to be consulted only with the utmost caution. The cultural and social contexts in which the *sīra* emerged, that is, the metropolitan centres of late antique Syria and Mesopotamia, were considerably different from those of the pre-canonical Qur'an, which came into being in the culturally peripheral Hijaz towns of Mecca and Medina. Furthermore, Islamic exegesis takes as established fact certain developments which only began to emerge towards the end of Muhammad's activity, such as the community's clear self-delimitation against Jews and Christians, and the claim that their scriptures were distorted. If we do not wish to submit uncritically to these traditional aids for understanding the Qur'an or, indeed, to discredit them out of hand as ideological constructions, they must be double-checked according to text-immanent parameters.

The approach to Qur'anic research proposed here, therefore, positions itself clearly outside the framework within which scholars still frequently operate (whereby they combine the Qur'anic text and Qur'anic commentaries to form a single subject of study). The fact that an analogous approach in Biblical studies (e.g. reading the Hebrew Bible together with the Midrash or reading the New Testament through the lens of comments by the early church fathers) would be frowned upon in academic contexts, shows clearly what exotic status has, until now, been assigned to the Qur'an. This essentialist view of the Qur'an, which has led to the inequality in the way it is studied when compared to other scriptures, is particularly disastrous since it obscures the revolutionary novelty of the discourse found within the Qur'an: its creative use of debate with the traditions of Late Antiquity. The approach proposed here is also remote from the current Syriacist scholarship which, though drawing a clear line between the Qur'an and its exegesis, stops short of discussing the Qur'anic texts as testimonies of their wider Arabic and Qur'anic contexts.

Third: Recitation vs. inlibration of God's word

The attempt to read the Qur'an through the lens of Christian theology and include it within a Christian discourse antedates recent scholarship. Evidence of this approach can be seen in the increasingly frequent application of the term 'inlibration' in reference to the Qur'an. The earlier perception had been that the basic similarity between the religions lay in their possession of a scripture, proclaiming a monotheistic message, in which cognate figures could be found, hence, Muhammad figured as the counterpart of Moses and Jesus. More recently, however, the main parallel between the two religions, drawn not only by Western but by Muslim scholars, is the manifestation of God's word, which in Christianity is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ

(incarnation) while in Islam it is embodied in the Qur'an (inlibration).[118] The neologism, inlibration, was first coined as early as 1976, when the American historian and philosopher Harry Wolfson was attempting to define the relationship between the two religions.[119] According to him, the Qur'an is as much the embodiment (in book form) of God's word as Christ is its embodiment (in the flesh). The parallels between 'becoming Qur'an' and 'becoming flesh' extend further still; the Iranian–American philosopher of religion Seyyed Hossein Nasr states: 'The medium of the divine message in Christianity is the Virgin Mary; in Islam it is the Prophet's soul.'[120] Nasr thus equates Mary's virginity with the Prophet's traditionally maintained illiteracy: just as Mary, who had 'known no man', bore a son who was completely God's creation, so too did Muhammad, who had no previous knowledge of scriptures, bring forth the Qur'an exclusively as God's creation.[121]

Despite the plausibility of these parallels,[122] there must be some scepticism (as has already been expressed by Daniel Madigan) towards the introduction of the concept of inlibration. Firstly, this transference onto Islam of the mythical concept from Christianity of a physical embodiment of God is particularly incongruous considering that Islam is a religion that is critical of myth in general. Secondly, the concept of inlibration is not the equal of the concept of incarnation, for, as Madigan says in criticism, while the Christians believe in God's word as living, active and personal, the Muslims would only possess a self-contained canon, dead letters.[123] This recalls St Paul's disparagement of the 'dead letter' of the Jewish law through its juxtaposition against the word written on the 'fleshy tables of the heart' (2 Corinthians 3:3) of the new covenant. However, Nasr, supporting the analogy between Christ and the Qur'an as we saw, lays claim to just such 'writing on the heart'.[124] This would make the analogy between Christ and the Qur'an tenable, provided the word 'Qur'an' is interpreted differently. What, in Islam, is much more essential than the codified text is the Qur'an's recitation, which is perceived as the restaging of the Prophet's repeating of God's words. It is therefore no coincidence that the physical and spiritual assimilation of the Qur'an through recitation has been compared to the consumption of the Eucharist in Christian ritual. Thus, it is not the text corpus but its recitation that figures as the sensually accessible manifestation of God's word, an Islamic counterpart of the incarnate world.[125]

New Horizons in Qur'anic Research

Two new approaches – based on the Qur'an as a text of Late Antiquity – appear auspicious for casting the Qur'an in a new light. The first concerns the text-referential character of the Qur'an as opposed to its assumed embedding

essentially in historical reality.[126] The second approach is the focus on a hitherto widely neglected referentiality which may be termed intra-Qur'anic or intratextuality. References to earlier proclaimed Qur'anic texts serve to provide certain late suras with an important new discursive charge which testifies to the historical development of the text.

First: Discerning between text-referential speech and speech based in reality

In the case of the suras of the early Meccan period, which will be the focus of the following discussion, we ought to assume a higher degree of text-referentiality than has been considered so far. As was shown in an earlier study,[127] the psalms (*al-zabūr*) are present in the Qur'an not only as reworkings of a preceding Biblical corpus, but as a liturgical prototype; many early suras sound like distant echoes of the psalms, such as the consolation suras, *Sūrat al-Kawthar* (Q. 108) and *Sūrat al-Sharḥ* (Q. 94); the hymn-like suras, *Sūrat al-Aʿlā* (Q. 87) and *Sūrat al-ʿAlaq* (Q. 96); and the 'refrain' suras such as *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* (Q. 55) and *Sūrat al-Wāqiʿa* (Q. 56), which are reminiscent of the litany psalms. It can be assumed that liturgical piety was built around the psalms in the late antique Syrian church. This church's impact extended into the peninsular region,[128] and it is likely to have made an impression on the members of the earliest Islamic community,[129] although this observation should not exclude the possibility of any parallel shaping influence exerted by Jewish tradition. A recently proposed hypothesis maintains that the word '*sūra*' is the cognate of the Syriac word '*shūrayā*', meaning 'beginning', which was used to refer to the psalm recitation introducing a Biblical reading.[130] Individual verses or groups of verses of the psalms may have been known under this designation, thus indicating their liturgical function. Early Qur'anic suras, similarly structured and equally ceremonially enacted, would have attracted that designation also.

It has been known for a long time that the polythematic early Meccan suras are structurally akin to the psalms, the latter constituting similarly mixed compositions.[131] That they were intended – like the psalms – to be used as liturgical texts, and thus to be solemnly chanted, can be deduced from their rhythmical structure and rhymed composition. The early Qur'an's literary form, as well as its function, is thus much more closely related to the psalter than, as is usually assumed, the Bible as a whole; it is only the later suras that refer more frequently to the Pentateuch and prophetic writings.

At the same time there are, however, weighty differences. The early suras do not simply replicate the outlook of the psalms. Their conception of time, for instance, is entirely different from that in the psalms. While many psalms

praise divine deeds of salvation that had occurred in the past, the early suras reflect the community's emerging conception of time which was oriented towards the eschatological future; it is this view of time that Muhammad was tasked with communicating to his listeners, who were still living with the old cyclical notion of time. The imminence of the Day of Judgement thus colours the numerous sequences of images which otherwise clearly recall the psalms: the celebration of nature as God's great creation, in what may be termed 'the nature *āyāt*',[132] the signs evident in nature, is no longer meant immediately as a praise of God, but has acquired an epistemic function: the *āyāt* are introduced as signifiers that encapsulate proof of God's omnipotence. This belief in God's omnipotence is the precondition for the acceptance of the core message of the early revelation, the resurrection of the dead for the Day of Judgement.

It must not, however, be overlooked that, through the presentation of the psalm-inspired images of nature, the Qur'an also describes a changed perception of nature and space compared to that in pre-Islamic texts.[133] In the pre-Islamic world view, which we may suppose was still familiar to the listeners, natural space was a challenge to man: it was not freely available but contested and needed to be conquered by the Bedouin hero. In the introductions (*nasīb*) of their odes, the ancient poets seldom express enjoyment of their geographical surroundings; on the contrary, the poets depict these as deserted and disfigured spaces in which they feel challenged to remember what the erstwhile inhabited space was like when it was filled with pleasant society and pulsated with life.[134] Unlike the attitude towards space expressed in poetry, the *āyāt* passages of the early suras follow that of the psalms in depicting space on earth as a place of delight and rest where divine gifts abound; they do this to the extent that, in some instances, natural space is depicted much like a *locus amoenus*, an idyllic space (e.g. Q. 78:6–16) – a view that is clearly inspired by the psalms.[135]

The spatial setting of Qur'anic events, however, is not nature, as it is in the psalms, but the city. The ideal city, described in *Sūrat al-Balad*,[136] is governed by an ethical code which aspires to the fair distribution of goods without human travail. The portrayal of the city as a structured space of commerce is the basis for an abundance of Qur'anic metaphors.[137] The Prophet's actual home city, however, seems to have offered an image of disruption. The persistent opposition of the Meccan elite, their rejection of the message, could seem to be the beginning of a late re-enactment of one of the many historical catastrophes to which earlier city dwellers in the Arabian peninsula had been subjected.[138] The Qur'an refers repeatedly to deserted habitations which were once the home of prosperous societies but which had fallen into disuse, not, however (according to the Qur'anic understanding), because of the collapse of

their buildings and irrigation systems (whether sudden or gradual) or because of other natural catastrophes, but as punishment of the non-believing denizens for their rejection of the messages sent to them by God. From the very beginning, these places are presented as collective *lieux de mémoire*, meaningful places reminding the listeners of a divine order within which there is equilibrium between human action and suffering. While this sentiment is an expression of trust in a just God, similar to that expressed in the psalms, the Qur'anic description of the derelict habitation is clearly a move away from the perception of space in the psalms. This comes as no surprise since perceptions of space in the late antique milieu of the Qur'an were not confined to Biblical models but relied on more diverse social experiences and thus on more recent literary expressions as well. The negative perception of the derelict habitations in the Qur'an evidently refers to the *nasīb* sections of ancient Arabic poetry. Yet, its pessimistic outlook is inverted in the Qur'an: the state of affairs is presented as the result of a justified divine retribution.

On the basis of this brief juxtaposition of the psalter and the *nasīb* of the ancient Arabic ode in the early suras, it appears likely that further cases of text-referentiality will be uncovered in the Qur'an, even in the passages in which earlier, 'naive', approaches saw a description of contemporary reality, namely in the later Meccan and Medinan suras. Of course, considering Wansbrough's criticism of the 'topoi of revelation', this observation of Biblical topoi in the Qur'an can hardly claim to be a novelty. However, it is important to insist that these topoi are not simply proof of Biblical and post-Biblical knowledge within undetermined circles of redactors, but mirror a discursive process among those listening to the Prophet. The gradual and, above all, functional adoption of Biblical and post-Biblical forms by the messenger and his community attest to the emergence of a new liturgical language.

Second: Studying Qur'anic intratextuality

A second new avenue of research focuses on Qur'anic intratextuality. As was shown earlier, the Meccan texts were characterised by intertextual references to poetry and to the Bible. These accepted intertexts were continuously revisited and enriched by new theological insights, particularly during the Medinan period, which was a phase of intensive exchange between the young community and their learned Jewish neighbours in Medina.[139] Thus, provoked by new theological insights put forward by Jewish and Christian participants in the debate, the community established new readings of the histories that had already been communicated in the Meccan suras. Let us mention but a few. The Holy Family, or, more precisely, Mary and Jesus, are presented in the Meccan *Sūrat Maryam* in an edifying manner as Biblical icons of exemplary

piety.[140] However, in the Medinan *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Q. 3), the stories of Mary and Jesus receive, in addition, a new religio-political relevance. Now the Holy Family, designated Āl 'Imrān, consisting predominantly of women, represents a counter-tradition (distinguished by the Christian virtue of humility) to the until-then solely authoritative patriarchal tradition that was represented by the descendants of Abraham, Āl Ibrāhīm.[141] This inclusion of the initially isolated figures of Mary and her son in a prophetic family, Āl 'Imrān, a family endowed with a particular ethical message, provided the community with a new model of authority that was able to competitively counter the exclusive model of authority from the Jewish tradition. It is all the more striking that this Christianocentric view is closely linked to the reception of a Rabbinical intertext. It refers to the exegetical principle, arguably upheld by Jewish learned men in Medina, that scriptural texts should be credited with bearing a multiplicity of meanings. *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* applies this principle by using the ambiguities found in the story of Mary, such as her ambiguous conception of Jesus and the indeterminateness of Mary's gender while she was still in her mother's womb, as metaphors for the ambiguities in the meaning of the scriptural verses. Because of the newly adopted Rabbinical principle, which constitutes a new extra-Qur'anic intertext – and which is mediated through the gender metaphors of the Christian narrative, already established in the Meccan version – varied interpretations of scriptural texts came to be seen as legitimate.[142]

It is no exaggeration to maintain that the Medinan revisions of Meccan texts on the whole exhibit a religio-political thrust that was arguably caused by competition with the other religions. Thus the story of the golden calf, which, in the middle Meccan *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* was narrated as an edifying story emphasising that even a grave transgression could be pardoned by the Divine, in the Medinan period assumes an interpretive point that cannot be explained solely by reference to its original Biblical text. The Medinan version reflects the tenor and even parts of the actual wording of the theological exegesis of this story as it is restaged in the Jewish atonement liturgy, where the event is lamented as being the manifestation of the Israelites' 'fall' and, hence, the site of the greatest possible sin. The dramatic tenor underscoring the issue of divine wrath is foreign to the Qur'anic Moses traditions found in the Meccan suras, and its appearance in the later texts is best explained through the contact that took place between the early community and exegetes (i.e. the learned members of the Jewish community) in Medina.[143] Consequently, a systematic reading of the Medinan additions to Meccan suras from the point of view of their Rabbinical, and possibly even Christian, intertexts remains an urgent desideratum. The Medinan texts convey an essentially new relationship

to the preceding textual traditions, since they no longer merely re-narrate older texts in paraenetic style, as was the case in Mecca, but imbue them with a new and highly sophisticated discursive dimension.

Such a scholarly approach that focuses on the interaction of different religious groups at the time of the Qur'an's extended period of emergence is required by the nature of the text itself. It is, however, of ecumenical relevance as well: the recognition of the kindred origin and genesis of the three religions – their documentation in a shared 'family tree' which is, according to Q. 24:35, *neither of the East nor of the West* – might provide the necessary impulse for reconsidering Islam as a religion inseparable from the Christian–Jewish tradition, and thus finally place the Qur'an on an equal footing with the two older monotheistic scriptures.[144]

NOTES

1 See Kenneth Cragg, 'The Finality of the Qur'an and the Contemporary Politics of Nations', in Ron Geaves *et al.*, eds., *Islam and the West Post 9/11* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 51–61. See also Angelika Neuwirth, *Koranforschung, eine politische Philologie?* (Berlin, 2013).

2 See Neuwirth, *Studien*. Cuypers has dedicated a monograph (*The Banquet*) to the analysis of the fifth sura and has also presented analytical studies of a number of early suras. His synchronic reading of the Qur'an, however, overleaps relevant analytical steps demanded by literary research.

3 Several new research projects on the Qur'an, however, have been established to redress this shortcoming. Among them is the Corpus Coranicum project, which so far has published two volumes: Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike* and eadem, *Der Koran*, vol. I. A complete commentary of the Qur'an is part of a large-scale publishing project being undertaken by Verlag der Weltreligionen, an arm of the Suhrkamp Verlag publishing house; see Jan Assmann and Hans-Joachim Simm, eds., *Die Religionen der Welt: Ein Almanach zur Eröffnung des Verlags der Weltreligionen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2007). Another Qur'anic research project, called 'Perspectives on the Qur'an: Negotiating Divergent Views of a Shared History', is being pursued at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin within the framework of its fellow programme 'Europe in the Middle East–the Middle East in Europe (EUME)'. It aims to initiate a discussion on Qur'anic history and reception between Western and Muslim scholars.

4 Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa* (Beirut, 1995).

5 Marco Schöller, 'Post-Enlightenment Academic Study of the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. IV, pp. 187–208.

6 An overview of his biography can be found in Hartmut Bobzin, *Mohammed* (Munich, 2000).

7 Samir Kassir, 'Das arabische Unglück: Von historischer Grösse, Selbstverlust und kultureller Wiedergeburt', *Letter Internationale* 71 (Winter 2005), p. 63 (= Samir Kassir, *Das arabische Unglück* [Berlin, 2006], p. 38).

8 Ibid., p. 63 (= Kassir, *Das arabische Unglück*, p. 38).

9 Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn, 1833; repr., Berlin, 2005).

10 The term 'post-Biblical traditions' is the collective name used to refer to late antique Biblical exegesis, Jewish and Christian alike.

11 See Jacob Lassner, 'Abraham Geiger: A Nineteenth-Century Jewish Reformer on the Origins of Islam', in Martin S. Kramer, ed., *The Jewish Discovery of Islam* (Tel Aviv, 1999), pp. 103–36.

12 For the contribution of this scholarship to Qur'anic studies, see Dirk Hartwig *et al.*, eds., *'Im vollen Licht der Geschichte': Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der Koranforschung* (Würzburg, 2008); Dirk Hartwig, 'Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung: Perspektiven einer modernen Koranhermeneutik', *Zeitschrift für Relgions- und Geistesgeschichte* 61 (2009), pp. 234–56; idem, 'Die "Wissenschaft des Judentums" als Gründerdisziplin der kritishcen Koranforschung: Abraham Geiger und die erste Generations jüdischer Koranforscher', in Christian Wiese, Walter Homolka and Thomas Brechenmacher, eds., *Jüdische Existenz in der Moderne: Abraham Geiger und die Wissenschaft des Judentum* (Berlin, 2013), pp. 297–319.

13 Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Gräfenhainichen, 1931 [actually published in 1935, but predated for political reasons]; repr., Hildesheim, 1988).

14 Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergstässer and Otto Pretzl, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes* (Leipzig, 1938; repr., Hildsheim, 1961).

15 Theodor Nöldeke, 'Zur Sprache des Korans', in Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strasbourg, 1910), pp. 1–30.

16 Johann Fück, 'Die Originalität des arabischen Propheten', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 90 (1936), pp. 509–25; Tor Andrae, *Mohammed: Sein Leben und sein Glaube* (Göttingen, 1932).

17 Fück, 'Die Originalität des arabischen Propheten', p. 510.

18 Ibid, p. 510. For a more recent appraisal of the research on the life of Muhammad, see Francis E. Peters, 'The Quest of the Historical Muhammad', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991), pp. 291–315.

19 See Richard Bell, *The Qur'ān: Translated, with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh, 1937 and 1939); idem, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh, 1953). For more on the document hypothesis, see Tilman Nagel, 'Vom "Qur'ān" zur "Schrift": Bell's Hypothese aus religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht', *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 143–83.

20 Karl Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien* (Strasbourg, 1906).

21 Alphonse Mingana, 'Syriac Influences on the Style of the Ḳur'ān', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927), pp. 77–98.

22 Anton Baumstark, 'Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus im Koran', *Der Islam* 16 (1927), pp. 229–48.

23 David Heinrich Müller, *Die Propheten in ihrer ursprünglichen Form: Die Grundgesetze der ursemitischen Poesie, erschlossen und nachgewiesen in Bibel, Keilinschriften und Koran, und in ihren Wirkungen erkannt in den Chören der griechischen Tragödie* (Vienna, 1896).

24 Gustav Richter, *Der Sprachstil des Koran*, ed. Otto Spies (Leipzig, 1940).

25 Definition taken from 'Textual Criticism', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, http://www.britannica.com. Also, see James E. Bellamy, 'Textual Criticism of the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. V, pp. 237–52.

26 Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Plan eines Apparatus Criticus zum Koran* (Munich, 1930).

27 See Abū 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn b. al-Khālawayh, *Mukhtaṣar fī shawādhdh al-Qur'ān min Kitāb al-Badī'*, ed. Gotthelf Bergsträsser (Cairo, 1934).

28 Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Nichtkanonische Koranlesarten im Muḥtasab des Ibn Ǧinnī* (Munich, 1933), p. 1. For information on the issue of variant traditions, see Rudi Paret, 'Ḳirā'a', *EI2*, vol. V, pp. 127–9 and Angelika Neuwirth, 'Koran', in Helmut Gätje, ed., *Grundriss der arabischen Philologie*, vol. II, *Literaturwissenschaft* (Wiesbaden, 1987), pp. 96–135.

29 Arthur Jeffery, 'Progress in the Study of the Qur'ān Text', *Muslim World* 25 (1935), pp. 4–16.

30 See Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices* (Leiden, 1937).

31 Gotthelf Bergsträsser, 'Die Koranlesung des Ḥasan von Baṣra', *Islamica* 2 (1926), pp. 11–57. For more on the Fourteen Readers, see Paret, 'Ḳirā'a'.

32 Gotthelf Bergsträsser, 'Koranlesung in Kairo' (with a contribution by Karl Huber), *Der Islam* 20 (1932), pp. 1–42 and *Der Islam* 21 (1933), pp. 110–40.
33 Nöldeke *et al.*, *Geschichte des Qorans III: Die Geschichte des Korantextes*.
34 Otto Pretzl, *Die Fortführung des Apparatus Criticus zum Koran* (Munich, 1930); idem, 'Die Wissenschaft der Koranlesung', *Islamica* 6 (1934), pp. 1–47, 230–46 and 290–331.
35 Anton Spitaler, *Die Verszählung des Koran nach islamischer Überlieferung* (Munich, 1935). His further works on Qur'anic philology are collected in idem, *Philologica: Beiträge zur Arabistik und Semitistik* (Wiesbaden, 1998).
36 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford, 1953); idem, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford, 1956); Rudi Paret, *Mohammed und der Koran: Geschichte und Verkündigung des arabischen Propheten* (Stuttgart, 1957); idem, 'Der Koran als Geschichtsquelle', *Der Islam* 37 (1961), pp. 24–42.
37 For more on this state of affairs, see Stefan Wild, 'Die "schauerliche Öde des heiligen Buches": Westliche Wertungen des koranischen Stils', in Alma Giese and J. Christoph Bürgel, eds., *Gott ist schön und Er liebt die Schönheit* (Bern, 1994), pp. 429–47.
38 See Edmund Beck, 'Der 'uthmanische Kodex in der Koranlesung des zweiten Jahrhunderts', *Orientalia* 14 (1945), pp. 355–73; idem, 'Studien zur Geschichte der kufischen Koranlesung' [Part I], 17 (1948), pp. 326–55; [Part II], 19 (1950), pp. 328–50; [Part III], 20 (1951), pp. 316–28; [Part IV], 22 (1953), pp. 59–78. So far, the most recent work on the field of textual history and criticism is from Andreas Kellermann, 'Koranlesung im Maghreb' (PhD Dissertation, Freie Universität, Berlin, 1996). The Corpus Coranicum project is presently refocusing on this field.
39 Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart, 1971; repr., 1980).
40 John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977).
41 For reviews of Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies*, see the following: William A. Graham in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100 (1980), pp. 137–41; Edward Ullendorff in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 40 (1977), pp. 609–12; Leon Nemoy in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 68 (1978), pp. 182–4; Angelika Neuwirth in *Die Welt des Islams* 28–29 (1984), pp. 539–42; Josef van Ess in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 35 (1978), pp. 349–53; Rudi Paret in *Der Islam* 55 (1978), pp. 354–6; Robert B. Serjeant in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 110 (1978), pp. 76–8; Gauthier H.A. Juynboll in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 24 (1979), pp. 293–6; Issa J. Boullata in *Muslim World* 67 (1977) pp. 306–7. For a detailed discussion of Wansbrough's questioning of the Islamic tradition, see Andreas Radtke, *Offenbarung zwischen Gesetz und Geschichte: Quellenstudien zu den Bedingungsfaktoren frühislamischen Rechtsdenkens* (Wiesbaden, 2003); Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden, 2009).
42 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977).
43 See Andrew Rippin's introduction to his *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford, 1988) for an insight into his position; Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge, 1999).
44 It is vexing that at the same time that Wansbrough was questioning the integrity of the traditional Islamic version of the history of the Qur'an, a contrary model that had been drafted at a neighbouring university and also published had received less attention; see John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (Cambridge, 1977). Based on his observations of legal history and Hadith criticism, Burton concluded that the Prophet himself was the final redactor of the Qur'an. See the review of Burton's book in Neuwirth, Review of *The Collection of the Qur'ān*, by John Burton, *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 76 (1981), pp. 372–80.
45 Günther Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qur'ān* (Erlangen, 1974).

46 Nicolai Sinai, 'Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Vorzeit: Günther Lülings apokalyptische Koranphilologie', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (19 February 2004).
47 Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache*.
48 Sinai, 'Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Vorzeit'.
49 See Gerald Hawting, Review of *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad: Eine Kritik am 'christlichen' Abendland*, by Günter Lüling, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 27 (1982), p. 108–12.
50 Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin, 2000; repr., 2004). In reference to Luxenberg, see also Michael Marx, 'Ein neuer Impuls für die Erforschung des Koran' [Part I], *Informationsprojekt Naher und Mittlerer Osten* 9, no. 33 (2003), pp. 45–57; [Part II], *Informationsprojekt Naher und Mittlerer Osten* 9, no. 34 (2003), pp. 50–52. The hypotheses put forward by Luxenberg were discussed during an interdisciplinary conference entitled 'Historische Sondierungen und methodische Reflexionen zur Korangenese: Wege zur Rekonstruktion des vorkanonischen Koran', which took place in Berlin, 21–25 January 2004. The proceedings have been published in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, eds., *The Qur'ān in Context*.
51 Luxenberg's method of reconstruction in *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran* has met with fierce criticism in Semitic studies: see François de Blois, 'Islam in its Arabian Context', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 615–24; Stefan Wild, 'Lost in Philology? The Virgins of Paradise and the Luxenberg Hypothesis', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 625–48; Walid A. Saleh, 'The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'ānic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise and Late Antiquity', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 649–98. See also the following reviews of Luxenberg's book: François de Blois in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003), pp. 92–7; Simon Hopkins in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003), pp. 377–80. Scholars who are not specialists in the Qur'an or in Arabic Studies, or who have no interest in the Qur'an as a literary artefact, tend to welcome Luxenberg's hypotheses; see the reviews by Martin Baasten in *Aramaic Studies* 2 (2004), pp. 268–72 and Johannes J.G. Jansen in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 60, nos. 3–4 (2000), pp. 477–80.
52 Sinai, 'Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Vorzeit'. In the meantime, the Christian origin of Islam postulated by Luxenberg has had far-reaching consequences. For example, the volume edited by Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam* (Berlin, 2005), attempts to rewrite early Islamic history as Christian history. See Sinai's comments on this work: Nicolai Sinai, 'Der lange Weg zur (relativen) Einheitlichkeit: Arabische Schrift und Koranüberlieferung', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (18 and 19 March 2007); idem, Review of *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, by Christoph Luxenberg, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 3–4 (2007), pp. 481–5; idem, 'Die Koranforschung tritt in die kritische Phase ein: Eine Antwort auf Karl-Heinz Ohligs Thesen zum Stand der Islamwissenschaft', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (28 December 2006), p. 31.
53 Sinai, unpublished typescript.
54 Gregor Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds* (Berlin, 1996).
55 For his seminal study, see Witztum, 'The Syriac Milieu'. See also idem, 'The Foundations of the House (Q 2:127)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (2009), pp. 25–40.
56 For a discussion of the important theological developments disclosed by Witztum's approach, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 643–9.
57 Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'Redeeming the Adam of the Qur'ān', in Detlev Kreikenbom, Franz-Cristoph Muth and Jörn Thielmann, eds., *Arabische Christen – Christen in Arabien*

(Frankfurt am Main, 2006), pp. 71–83; idem, ed., *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context* (Abingdon, 2008); idem, 'The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (2009), pp. 237–58; idem, 'On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*taḥrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130 (2010), pp. 189–202; idem, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext* (Abingdon, 2010); idem, 'Reading the Qur'an as Homily: The Case of Sara's Laughter', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 585–92; idem, ed., *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2* (New York, 2011).

58 See in particular Kevin van Bladel, 'The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur'ān 18:83–102', in Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, pp. 175–203; idem, 'The Syriac Sources of the Early Arabic Narratives of Alexander', in Himanshu Prabha Ray and Daniel T. Potts, eds., *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia* (New Delhi, 2007), pp. 54–75; Emran El-Badawi, 'Divine Kingdom in Syriac Matthew and the Qur'ān', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 61 (2009), pp. 1–42; idem, 'Condemnation in the Qur'ān and the Syriac Gospel of Matthew', in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, pp. 449–66.

59 Genre criticism is one of the steps within literary criticism which analyses texts by grouping them with others of similar formal features or rhetorical exigencies so as to determine their literary genre.

60 Redaction criticism is a critical method that was first developed in the study of Biblical texts. Regarding the author of the text as editor or redactor of his or her source materials, this approach focuses on his or her strategies in shaping and moulding the narrative to express particular theological goals.

61 Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, p. 13.

62 Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, 'Observations on Early Qur'an Manuscripts in San'ā'', in Stefan Wild, ed., *The Qur'an as Text* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 107–11; Ursula Dreibholz, *Frühe Koranfragmente aus der Grossen Moschee in Sanaa = Early Quran Fragments from the Great Mosque in Sanaa* (Yemen, 2003). See also Frederik Leemhuis, 'Codices of the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 347–61.

63 The same holds true for a particularly well preserved, though incomplete, codex, the codex Parisino-Petropolitanus, which has been dated back to the second half of the first/seventh century; see Francois Déroche, *La transmission écrite de Coran dans les débuts de l'islam* (Leiden, 2009).

64 See Omar Hamdan, *Studien zur Kanonisierung des Korantextes: al-Ḥasan al-Basrī's Beiträge zur Geschichte des Korans* (Wiesbaden, 2006); idem, 'The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project: A Step towards the Canonization of the Qur'an', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 795–836.

65 Alfred-Louis de Prémare, 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān et le Processus de Constitution du Coran', in Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, eds., *Die dunklen Anfänge: Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam* (Berlin, 2005), pp. 179–211.

66 Fred McGraw Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), p. 84.

67 Jeffery, *Materials*.

68 See, for example, Q. 69:44 and Q. 52:33 as evidence of this from the early Meccan period.

69 Angelika Neuwirth, 'Structure and the Emergence of Community', in Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān* (Malden, MA, 2007), pp. 140–58.

70 See chapter 5, 'From Recitation through Liturgy to Canon: Sura Composition and Dissolution During the Development of Islamic Ritual', in this volume.

71 William Graham, 'Scripture and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. IV, p. 559.

72 See Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

73 On the implications of canonisation, see Aziz al-Azmeh, 'The Muslim Canon from Late Antiquity to the Era of Modernism', in Arie van der Kooij, Karel van der Toorn and

Joannes Augustinus Maria Snoek, eds., *Canonization and Decanonization* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 191–228.

74 See Angelika Neuwirth, 'Offenbarung – Inlibration – Eingebung oder Herabsendung auf die Gemeinde? Mediale Wege der koranischen Verkündigung', in Joachim Negel and Margareta Gruber, eds., *Figuren der Offenbarung: Biblisch, Religionstheologisch, Politisch* (Münster, 2012), pp. 205–36.

75 Aziz al-Azmeh, 'Chronophagous Discourse: A Study of the Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic Tradition', in Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy, eds., *Religion and Practical Reason: New Essays in the Comparative Philosophy of Religions* (Albany, NY, 1994), pp. 163–208.

76 The guarded tablet is very similar to the heavenly register that is spoken of in the Book of Jubilees (second century BC). This intertextuality between the Qur'an and the Book of Jubilees remains relevant, even later when the heavenly 'original' appears as *kitāb* (scripture); see 'The Later Meccan Period' later in this chapter.

77 See Nicolai Sinai and Angelika Neuwirth, 'Introduction', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 1–26. The connection between the creed formula in *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* and in Judaism has also been noted by Mehmet Paçacı; see Mehmet Paçacı, 'Sag: Gott ist ein einziger – aḥad/aehad. Ein exegetischer Versuch zu Sure 112 in der Perspektive der semitistischen Religionstradition', in Felix Körner, ed., *Alter Text – neuer Kontext: Koranhermeneutik in der Türkei heute* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 2006), pp. 166–203. Paçacı, however, regards the Qur'anic elements from the Jewish creed as manifestations of the monotheistic 'Semitic religious tradition' extant in the milieu. The Qur'an's novelty, its negotiation and theological reformulation of older texts, is thus not illuminated. For more on recent Turkish studies on the Qur'an, see Felix Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkish University Theology: Rethinking Islam* (Würzburg, 2005).

78 See, Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

79 See chapter 9, 'Evil'.

80 See also chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures'.

81 Concerning the predominantly oral nature of the Qur'an, see William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge, 1987).

82 The modification of the sequence of the suras is explained in detail in Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I. There, a comprehensive characterisation of the individual suras and groups of suras is given. The content of this partial corpus is identical to the one determined by Nöldeke, except for the omission of the suras Q. 112 to Q. 114. (Reference to Nöldeke, as opposed to any other scholar, is justified since his classification is still the most comprehensive and best documented).

83 See chapter 3, 'Glimpses'.

84 Although the Qur'an entails no apocalyptic speculations about a new era, it does recall the scenario of the dissolution of the cosmos in the initial sections of the early suras.

85 See chapter 3, 'Glimpses'.

86 See chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.

87 See chapter 4, 'Images'.

88 See chapter 3, 'Glimpses'.

89 Baumstark, 'Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus'.

90 See also Mingana, 'Syriac Influences'.

91 See Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

92 The phrase 'later Meccan' includes both middle Meccan and late Meccan.

93 See chapter 7, 'Referentiality'.

94 See chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

95 Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis/Cultural Memory*.

96 The introduction of the first *qibla* towards Jerusalem, which is widely neglected in Qur'anic scholarship, needs to be considered as an important element of the middle Meccan suras' *Sitz im Leben*. It is discussed in chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'; the liturgical development of the Qur'anic community in Mecca is the subject of chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

97 See chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.

98 See Hartmut Bobzin, 'The "Seal of the Prophets": Towards an Understanding of Muhammad's Prophethood', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 565–84.

99 See chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

100 This important Qur'anic epithet *ḥanīf* meaning 'original believer', and thus a non-ecclesiastically bound person, is a loan word from the Syriac *hanpa* meaning 'heathen'; accordingly, *ḥanīf* was used in pre- and early Islamic eras to refer to a believer who was not a polytheist and also not an adherent of Judaism or Christianity.

101 The Arabic *ummī* corresponds to the rabbinic *me-ummot ha-'olam*, meaning 'from among the [non-Jewish] peoples of the world'.

102 On the institution of fasting, see Kees Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran* (Leiden, 1968).

103 The *Studien* was received favourably by the critics from within the field of historical Qur'anic studies. See the following reviews: Alford T. Welch in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 4 (1983), pp. 764–7; Tilman Nagel in *Die Welt des Islams* 22 (1982), pp. 202–4; Fazlur Rahman, 'Some Recent Books on the Qur'ān by Western Authors', *Journal of Religion* 64 (1984), pp. 73–95. Some scholars, however, were not favourably disposed towards it; see Andrew Rippin's review in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45 (1982), pp. 149–50. The approach of the *Studien* has been rediscovered only more recently; see Neal Robinson's *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London, 1996) which discusses the methodology of the *Studien* and thus contributed to the dissemination of that work in English-speaking countries without, however, seriously upsetting the widespread sceptical approach. Some introductions to the Qur'an and Islam refer to the *Studien*, such as Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran: Eine Einführung* (Munich, 1999); idem, *Aus dem Arabischen neu übertragen* (Munich, 2010); Michael A. Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford, 1983); Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān* (Cambridge, 2006); Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān* (Malden, MA, 2007). Historical examinations of individual Qur'anic topoi and forms have been integrated into numerous articles in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

104 See Wolfgang Richter, *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft: Entwurf einer alttestamentlichen Literaturtheorie und Methodologie* (Göttingen, 1971) and the section in this chapter entitled 'Syriacist Scholarship in Qur'anic Studies'.

105 Müller, *Die Propheten*.

106 Angelika Neuwirth, 'Sūra(s)', *EQ*, vol. V, pp. 166–77.

107 Such studies include August Fischer, *Der Wert der vorhandenen Koran-Übersetzungen und Sure 111* (Leipzig, 1937); David Künstlinger, 'Sura 95', *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 76 (1936), pp. 1–3; Richard Bell, 'Sūrat al-Ḥashr: A Study of its Composition', *Muslim World* 38 (1948), pp. 29–42; Harris Birkeland, *The Lord Guideth: Studies on Primitive Islam* (Oslo, 1956).

108 See, for example, Mustansir Mir, 'The *Sūra* as a Unity: A Twentieth Century Development in Qur'ān Exegesis', in Gerald Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds., *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London, 1993), pp. 211–24; Michael Sells, 'A Literary Approach to the Hymnic Sūras in the Qur'ān: Spirit, Gender and Aural Intertextuality', in Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān* (Richmond, 2000), pp. 3–25; Angelika Neuwirth, 'Zur Struktur der *Yūsuf*-Sure', in Werner Diem and Stefan Wild, eds., *Studien aus Arabistik und Semitistik* (Wiesbaden, 1980), pp. 123–52.

109 Even codicological arguments would corroborate this assertion: in all the Qur'anic manuscripts that have been studied, the text is divided into suras identical with those transmitted in the canonised *muṣḥaf*.

110 Exceptions are Birkeland, *The Lord Guideth*; Islam Dayeh, 'al-Ḥawāmīm: Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan Surahs', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 461–98; see also chapter 4, 'Images'.

111 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen: Psalm 1–50* (Würzburg, 1993).

112 See in particular Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, PA, 1970); idem, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*; idem, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia, PA, 1985).

113 Christoph Dohmen and Manfred Oeming, *Biblischer Kanon, warum und wozu? Eine Kanontheologie* (Freiburg, 1992), p. 25.

114 Ibid., p. 25.

115 Navid Kermani, *Gott ist schön: Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran* (Munich, 2000), p. 97.

116 Hossfeld and Zenger, *Die Psalmen*, p. 20.

117 These suras are currently being examined within the framework of the Corpus Coranicum project.

118 See Stefan Wild, *Mensch, Prophet und Gott im Koran: Muslimische Exegeten des 20. Jahrhunderts und das Menschenbild der Moderne* (Münster, 2001); idem, '"We have sent down to thee the Book with the truth . . ." – Spatial and Temporal Implications of the Qur'anic Concepts of *nuzūl*, *tanzīl* and *inzāl*', in Wild, *The Qur'an as Text*, pp. 137–56. See also Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen des Islam: Die Geschichte des Sufismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), p. 50. The awareness of the problems arising from such a parallelisation has been advanced in particular by Daniel Madigan in 'Gottes Botschaft an die Welt: Christen und Muslime, Jesus und der Koran', *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift 'Communio'* 32 (2003), pp. 100–112; idem, 'God's Word to the World'; Neuwirth, 'Offenbarung'.

119 Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, MA, 1976), pp. 244–8.

120 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London, 1966), pp. 43–4, quoted in Madigan, 'God's Word to the World', p. 160.

121 See Sebastian Günther, 'Ummī', *EQ*, vol. V, pp. 399–402; idem, 'Illiteracy', *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 492–8.

122 The parallels are not always accurate: it is not always the messenger who is the sole conveyer of the word. During a certain phase of the Medinan development of the Qur'an, the *umm al-kitāb* (literally, 'mother of scripture'), of unmistakably female gender, is foregrounded as the container of the word. The closest parallel here is the hypostasis of wisdom as God's first creation; see Elliot R. Wolfson, 'The Body in the Text: A Kabbalistic Theory of Embodiment', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (2005), pp. 479–500. Concerning the contextualisation of *umm al-kitāb* with the Byzantine concept of Mary as the Theotokos (mother of God), see chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'.

123 Madigan, 'God's Word to the World'.

124 Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, quoted in Madigan, 'God's Word to the World', p. 166.

125 André Lacocque, '"Apocalyptic Symbolism": A Ricoeurian Hermeneutical Approach', *Biblical Research* 26 (1981), pp. 8–9.

126 On the particular subject of text-referentiality, see Stefan Wild, ed., *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān* (Wiesbaden, 2006); chapter 7, 'Referentiality'.

127 See chapter 3, 'Glimpses'.

128 Isabel Toral-Niehoff, 'The 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra: An Arab Christian Community in Late Antiquity Iraq', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 323–48.

129 Sidney Griffith, 'Christians and Christianity', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 307–16.

130 For more on the proposed connection between the word *sūra* and the recitation of the Psalms, see Neuwirth, 'Structure and the Emergence of Community'.
131 Angelika Neuwirth, 'Einige Bemerkungen zum besonderen sprachlichen und literarischen Charakter des Koran', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 19 (1977), Supplement 3.1, pp. 736–9; see also Arie Schippers, 'Psalms', *EQ*, vol. IV, pp. 314–17.
132 Kenneth Cragg, *The Mind of the Qur'ān: Chapters in Reflection* (London, 1973), pp. 146–62.
133 Angelika Neuwirth, 'Geography', *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 293–313.
134 Gottfried Müller, *Ich bin Labīd und das ist mein Ziel: Zum Problem der Selbstbehauptung in der altarabischen Qaside* (Wiesbaden, 1981).
135 See chapter 3, 'Glimpses'.
136 For a detailed analysis of the sura, see chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
137 See Andrew Rippin, 'The Commerce of Eschatology', in Wild, *The Qur'an as Text*, pp. 125–36; see also Charles C. Torrey, *The Commercial-Theological Terms in the Koran* (Leiden, 1892).
138 Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin, 1926).
139 See Julian Oberman, 'Koran and Agada: The Events at Mount Sinai', *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 58 (1941), pp. 23–48; see also Uri Rubin, *The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, NJ, 1999).
140 See chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary'.
141 See chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'; Angelika Neuwirth, 'The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 499–532.
142 See chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'.
143 See chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures'.
144 This type of non-essentialist analysis of the Qur'an is at the heart of the EUME project, 'Perspectives on the Qur'an', http://www.eume-berlin.de/en/interconnected-research-fields/perspectives-on-the-quran-negotiating-different-views-of-a-shared-history.html.

2

From Tribal Genealogy to Divine Covenant: Qur'anic Re-figurations of Pagan Arab Ideals based on Biblical Models*

Pagan Arab Ideals: Historical Background

Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you (*Inna akramakum 'inda'llāhi atqākum*, Q. 49:13). Using this verse from the Medinan *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt* (Q. 49) as their slogan, the Khārijīs – a political opposition movement of early Islam[1] – entered the arena of the first/seventh-century argument about who ought to be considered the legitimate ruler of the new Islamic political entity. This motto reflected the principle, repeatedly articulated in the Qur'an, that a person's status should not be based on genealogy (i.e. on noble pedigree), as the pagan Arabs upheld, but rather on the individual's piety (*taqwā*), a concept equivalent to the Greek notion of *eusebeia* that was central to late antique Christian thought. The idea was revolutionary in the Arabian milieu because the contrary position – according to which persons were deemed noble (*karīm*) based on their familial pedigree – rested at the heart of the concept of *muruwwa* (heroism),[2] the dominant behavioural code which was strongly imprinted with Bedouin values. Familial lineage was often celebrated in the central literary medium of the time, the ancient Arabic *qaṣīda*, whose final section often contained a *mufākhara*, a song in praise of the tribe with which the poet was associated. According to Walid Saleh, the idea was equally revolutionary in view of the claims of the other monotheistic religions recorded in the Qur'an:

> The Quran shows profound distrust of the filial language of both Judaism and Christianity ... Family ties are mocked, and the Quran enshrines personal responsibility. What scandalized the Arabs most about Muhammad was his disregard for kinship ties. In verse 5:18–19 the

* Revised version of a translation by W. Scott Chahanovich.

> Quran goes to the heart of the sonship-fathership theology of Judaism and Christianity, only to mock it and tie the coming of Muhammad to the absence of prophetic missions . . . As a matter of fact, the Quran as well as the Ummah it envisioned were based on the negation of father-son ties, and on the breaking of kinship ties. As far as salvation is envisioned, it is not tied to blood.[3]

It should not be surprising that after the death of the Prophet in 10/632 – an event that conclusively defined the end of the proclamation of the Qur'an – the old pagan position was revived and even politically implemented. With Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (r. 41/661–60/680), a prominent member of the Meccan Umayyad clan became ruler of the Muslim community. Muʿāwiya was a person whose will to power was strong enough to make him assert himself as the founder of the first dynasty of Islam. Under the Umayyad rule from 41/661 to 132/750 the Arab state extended into the Near East and North Africa, thereby creating a plurinational empire. Yet tribal hegemony did not fade away. In the new state, comprised of many different peoples, social mobility for non-Arab citizens was not warranted by conversion alone but was additionally dependent on clientage with an Arab tribe. Simultaneously, the Umayyads expended great effort in arabising state representation,[4] administration as well as coinage. This project of arabisation also included the official publication of the Qur'an,[5] and the systematic construction and fixation of Arab tribal genealogies.[6] During the age of conquests, tribal lineage was a powerful instrument that not only allowed individuals to gain prestige but to secure material privileges. However, the Umayyads were not solely concerned with promoting this societal/tribal aspect of Arab genealogy, they were equally intensely interested in embedding Arab genealogies in Biblical history by constructing a Biblical lineage for the Arab tribes which conveniently redefined the Arabs, the recipients of the Arabic Qur'an, as a community both steeped in and springing from Biblical tradition.[7]

The Umayyads, within a few decades, succeeded in eliminating their rivals, the Khārijīs. Yet, with the triumph of genealogical lineage over the principle of individual piety, not only was a partisan view forsaken but so too was a central accomplishment of the Qur'anic message: the supersession of genealogical loyalties by religious ones. However, this latter concept's political failure (i.e. its non-implementation) during the Umayyad period should not make us forget that the Qur'anic paradigm shift had become an ideological breakthrough in the emerging Muslim community, which could, in Stroumsa's terms, be described as a religious mutation of Late Antiquity.[8]

The Qur'an's Engagement with Genealogy

The Qur'anic debate revolving around the genealogical principle of *nasab* (family genealogy) which figured so highly in the ancient Arabian canon of values, and by extension the debate about an individual's belonging to a clan or tribe, seems to have begun quite early. It by far antedates considerations about desirable moral attitudes towards one's kin, expressed in recommendations of how to deal with wives, children, parents. An oblique reference to this debate can be found in one of the earliest Qur'anic suras, *Sūrat al-Kawthar*.[9] This consolation sura was most plausibly intended to invert a calumny that had been levelled against the messenger in which he was criticised for being a man 'cut off' from his clan.

Q. 108

1 *Surely We have given thee abundance* (*kawthar*);
2 *so pray unto thy Lord and sacrifice.*
3 *Surely he that hates thee, he is the one cut off.*

With its triumphal affirmation that a special privilege has been accorded the addressee, the sura serves to assure the listeners that a crisis has been overcome. The exact nature of God's favour (i.e. abundance) is left vague, yet the morphologically intensive form *kawthar* narrows possible meanings to something that is 'extremely generous' and 'fulfilling'. In all likelihood, God's consolation should be understood as 'spiritual recompense', perhaps embodied in the newly disclosed power of proclamation. Empowering the messenger with spiritual abundance compensates for the poor pedigree for which he was derided (as we may infer from Q. 108:3); this poor pedigree may have stemmed from Muhammad's not belonging to a powerful and protective family clan (i.e. his lack of *nasab*) or from his not having any sons. In this sura, the divine privilege bestowed on the individual trumps the privilege stemming from genealogy.[10]

This argument is developed further in *Sūrat al-Takāthur* (Q. 102), which seems to have been proclaimed shortly after *Sūrat al-Kawthar*.

Q. 102

1 [*Greed for abundance*][11] *diverts you,*
2 [*such that*] *you visit the tombs.*
3 *No indeed; but soon you shall know.*
4 *Again, no indeed; but soon you shall know.*
5 *No indeed; did you know with the knowledge of certainty,*
6 *you shall surely see Hell;*

7 *Again, you shall surely see it with the eye of certainty*
8 *then you shall be questioned that day concerning true bliss.*

In this text, the message is not only directed to a wider public, indicated by the second-person plural, but the messenger also 'strikes back' against his adversaries with a polemic address; it is not he himself but the pagans, according to him, who find themselves in a state of need. They have been so obsessed – so 'diverted' (*alhākumu'l-takāthur*) as the verse puts it – with (we may infer) expanding their family alliances and, by extension, with improving their wealth and status, that they have lapsed into ancestry worship, they *visit the tombs* (Q. 102:2), heedless of the need to consider their own eschatological future.[12] The pagans' reverence of their forefathers was to remain a ubiquitous topic within the later suras of the Meccan period. Thus Q. 56:47–8 reports that they scoff at the notion that their ancestors will be raised from the dead: *What, when we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we indeed be raised up?/ What, and our fathers, the ancients?* Resurrection, an event making all men equal, would deprive their forefathers of the privileged status they continue to enjoy post-mortem. The problem of ancestor worship was still unresolved in the Medinan suras, as is seen in Q. 2:200, where the Meccan pilgrims are entreated to *remember God, as you remember your fathers or yet more devoutly.*

The seeds of this debate, however, were first spread in early Mecca. The subject was subliminally pursued, hidden in a linguistic pun. It appears to be more than just by chance that the titles of the two chronologically close suras – *Sūrat al-Kawthar* and *Sūrat al-Takāthur* – display a morphologically conspicuous derivation of the root *k-th-r*, a clue that seems to suggest a dialectic connection between the two texts. The Qur'an reproaches the pagans for their obsession with familial ties, which are also understood as a genealogical guarantee for a life of enjoyment. Throughout the Meccan period, the preoccupation with the family is continually re-invoked and warned to lead to a dead end.[13]

Disempowering the Clan System: Individual Accountability Supersedes Collective Accountability (Early Meccan Period)

The argument most effective in devaluating the tribal structure's provision of security in a situation of crisis was, however, the Qur'anic projection of the eschatological future. To highlight the radical hermeneutical shift which that new theologoumenon produced in those pagans listening to the Prophet, it is useful to recall Gustav von Grunebaum's assessment:

> Fear of the [Day of] Judgment, that will come into force at the end of this world, was, if not the most powerful, at least the most compelling explanation

> for the galvanizing drive behind the Prophet's message and his listeners' attention. The way in which the Arab, as he was told, would be judged was not the same way in which he, following his ancestors' footsteps . . . would have judged himself.[14]

Previously, good and evil, justice and injustice, were values used to gauge the tribe's honour and status, not categories to judge an individual's moral behaviour. In recompense for loyalty, the tribe guaranteed individuals protection and prestige. However, the elevated standing of the individual in the clan or tribe would be inconsequential on the Day of Judgement – as early Qur'anic texts drawing on Gospel imagery show – thus revealing the tribal system's weakness. *Sūrat 'Abasa* (Q. 80) says:[15]

Q. 80: 33–7

33 *And when the Blast shall sound,*
34 *upon the day when a man shall flee from his brother,*
35 *his mother, his father,*
36 *his consort, his sons,*
37 *every man that day shall have business to suffice him.*

The scenario projected in this text portrays an inverted image of clan solidarity. The idea of an eventually powerless tribal system vis-à-vis the imminence of individually experienced eschatology is formulated even more drastically in *Sūrat al-Ma'ārij* (Q. 70):[16]

Q. 70: 8–14

8 *Upon the day when heaven shall be as molten copper*
9 *and the mountains shall be as plucked wool-tufts,*
10 *no loyal friend shall question loyal friend,*
11 *as they are given sight of them.*
The sinner will wish that he might ransom himself from the chastisement of that day even by his sons,
12 *his companion wife, his brother,*
13 *his kin who sheltered him,*
14 *and whosoever is in the earth, all together, so that then it might deliver him.*

On Judgement Day familial ties and bonds of friendship will no longer be binding. An inverted world emerges where the head of the household, instead of sheltering his relatives, will be willing to ransom them to save his soul. The scenario even eclipses its Gospel counterpart, the drastic case of the

'unmerciful servant' from Matthew 18:21–35, who, pressured to give away his family as a ransom for himself, at the last minute manages to attain his donor's pardon.[17] To survive Judgement Day a more reliable orientation than the tribal is demanded. It was by subscribing to the new ethos of the 'care of the self' – the concept of individual accountability – that everyone could ensure they were prepared for Judgement Day. This ethos introduced a new canon of values in which the stranger and the disadvantaged – not one's kith or kinsman who garnered prestige by tribal association – were seen to be the primary addressees of charity.

Sūrat al-Balad,[18] unfolding around the metaphor of the 'two highways' in life, develops a scenario of practically applied piety in which charity, a standard topos in the middle Meccan catalogue of virtues,[19] figures as the strongest agency of social cohesion.

Q. 90

1 *No, I swear by this [town],*[20]
2 *and thou art a lodger in this [town],*
3 *by the begetter, and that he begot,*
4 *indeed, We created man in trouble.*
5 *What, does he think none has power over him,*
6 *saying, 'I have [destroyed] wealth abundant'?*[21]
7 *What, does he think none has seen him?*
8 *Have We not appointed to him two eyes,*
9 *and a tongue, and two lips,*
10 *and guided him on the two highways?*
11 *Yet he has not assaulted the steep;*
12 *and what shall teach thee what is the steep?*
13 *The freeing of a slave,*
14 *or giving food upon a day of hunger*
15 *to an orphan near of kin*
16 *or a needy man in misery;*
17 *then that he become of those who believe . . .*
18 *Those are the Companions of the Right Hand*
19 *And those who disbelieve in Our signs,*
they are the Companions of the Left Hand;
20 *over them is a Fire covered down.*

Sūrat al-Balad starts with a cluster of oaths (Q. 90:1–3). The first, *No! I swear by this town* (*lā uqsimu bi-hādhā'l-balad*), conjures the high rank of Mecca as an urban settlement and, implicitly, as a sacred place since Mecca, the home

town of the addressee, has been introduced as a sanctuary before. The second oath, *by the begetter, and that he begot* (*wa wālidin wa mā walad*), connects the town with the act of procreation, the foundation of societal life.[22] At least two semantic registers have thus been introduced: the sacred and topographic – town (*balad*) – on the one hand, and the physiological and social – begetter/begotten (*wālid*/*walad*) – on the other. The oath cluster, which connects procreation to sacredness, is thus a particularly emphatic prelude to the ensuing statement which is surprisingly negative in tone, claiming that man, in spite of all his merits in constituting the town, has been created as a deficient being: *indeed, we created man in trouble* (*laqad khalaqnā'l-insāna fī kabad*, Q. 90:4).[23] The somewhat non-specific phrase 'created . . . in trouble' is explained in the ensuing verses: man (*insān*) is still committed to the pagan code of behaviour, a state of affairs that transpires blatantly through his attitude towards worldly possessions, which he wastes through overspending: *'I have consumed wealth abundant'* (*yaqūlu ahlaktu mālan lubad*, Q. 90:6). The ostentatious wastefulness alluded to in Q. 90:6 echoes, almost literally, similar boasts made in poetic verse. Wastefulness is the expected behaviour of the poet-hero in the Bedouin context; there, it does not entail misbehaviour but an ideal of the ancient Arab ethos. The poet-hero – 'Antara – who defends himself in numerous verses of poetry against his detractors, stands proud of his excessive love of life: 'Whenever I drink, I bring ruin to my wealth!' (*fa-idhā sharibtu fa-innanī mustahlikun mālī*).[24] In light of the imminent Day of Judgement, which makes every man humble before God, this pagan orientation is anathema to the Qur'anic ethos which is built on the principle of *taqwā* (fear of God).[25]

Pitted against this image of the self-sufficient but ultimately ignorant individual (who has not realised that he is bound to render account of himself in the hereafter) is a new image of man. In the latter, man is divinely endowed with the faculties of sight (i.e. discernment) and speech (i.e. understanding), as indicated in Q. 90:8–9: *Have we not appointed to him two eyes,/and a tongue, and two lips* (*A-lam naj'al lahu 'aynayn; wa lisānan wa shafatayn*). This physiological equipment (continuing the physiological register of the second oath) makes him accountable for his actions. Yet his equipment not only entails a moral commitment, it mirrors the harmony of the divine creation: man is structured in a balanced way, having a pair of eyes and a pair of lips – morphologically clad in a dual form. It is this empirically verifiable structure of man as a microcosm that needs to be imposed on the town, the macrocosm, as well. Thus, the same device of the dual form is applied to the structure of the town, hence two highways run through it: *and* [*We*] *guided him on the two highways* (*wa hadaynāhu'l-najdayn*, Q. 90:10).

The not-yet-assaulted 'steep' (*al-ʿaqaba*, Q. 90:11) is a puzzle at first. Though the system of highways evoked here initially seems to refer to the topography of the addressee's hometown, Mecca, its evocation of the Biblical metaphor (e.g. Matthew 7:13–14) of the two ways signifying opposite moral options is hard to miss. The enigma of the steep way is solved in Q. 90:13–16: to opt for the steep way is a moral endeavour – the triple act of freeing slaves, of feeding the hungry and of caring for those in need. The three charitable acts, however, are not new, but reflect a frequently quoted text from the Hebrew Bible, Isaiah 58:6–7:

> 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?
> 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

The three acts of charity which had first been set as requirements in this Biblical text were, in Late Antiquity, recast within an eschatological and, at the same time, Christological framework in Matthew 25:34–46. On Judgement day, Christ will bless the people 'on his right hand' by allowing them to enter the kingdom of heaven, for their charitable acts towards their fellow man is like kindness shown to Christ himself (Matthew 25:40: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me'); he will condemn those 'on his left hand' to hellfire for having failed to perform the acts of charity. The Qur'anic reference to the *Companions of the Right Hand* (*aṣḥāb al-maymana*, Q. 90:18) and the *Companions of the Left Hand* (*aṣḥāb al-mashʾama*, Q. 90:19) seems to echo Matthew's wording. A Biblical canon of values laid out eschatologically in the Gospel – which, however, in the Qur'an is stripped of the Christological connotation it had acquired in tradition – has taken the place of the pagan Arabian code of conduct in the Qur'an. The authority of scriptural tradition has supplanted the power of the pagan ancestral tradition.

Replacing Genealogical Relationships with a Covenantal One (Middle Meccan Period)

The orientation towards scripture, which became predominant in the middle Meccan period – when the emerging Islamic community developed a conscious sense of belonging to the Biblical people of God – afforded the Qur'anic community the opportunity to view the question of genealogy in a

broader context. With the adoption of the *qibla* towards Jerusalem, they had distanced themselves from the local Meccan cult, a shift in orientation which is reflected in the middle Meccan suras where the earlier cherished Arabian scenarios are replaced with Biblical figures and narratives. Biblical figures thus became exemplars, bearing significance for the *nasab* problem as well. Given the cultural importance of the *nasab* relationships in the local clan-based society, forsaking one's own pagan clan was deemed scandalous. Yet, in many cases, the emerging religious movement asked their members to do just that: to leave those relatives who were not willing to convert. In these cases the abandonment of one's own kith and kin was considered a meritorious act, an act vindicated with the help of Biblical analogies. It was Abraham, above all, whose example could be evoked in this debate: he, according to the Qur'anic reading of the story of his departure from his homeland Haran, had distanced himself from his pagan clan. The Qur'anic Abraham narrative in *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* (Q. 37) is comprised of two complementary parts: a story of punishment and salvation, on the one hand, and a story of trial and tribulation, on the other. The first part thematically illustrates the Qur'anic topic of the hardship a prophet must endure among his own intractable people, from whom, under dramatic circumstances, he is later saved. Importantly, though, this account revolves around Abraham's proactive conduct: the destruction of the idols worshipped by his people and his father. This is the prime episode in the Qur'anic depiction of Abraham, yet it is not Biblically based but has its origin in the Jewish hagiographic tradition, the Haggadah.[26] While the Biblical story of Abraham in Genesis 12 starts with his departure, at God's command, from his land and family, the Qur'an's Abraham – as in the Midrash – exchanges blood ties (genealogy) for a spiritual bond. The chief reason for his departure (*I am going to my Lord*, Q. 37:99) is the rejection of his homeland's wilful heathenism – a narrative that had already been deduced by earlier Jewish exegetes from Biblical statements not included in the canonical Genesis account.[27] Such reports are found in the Book of Jubilees,[28] an apocrypha from the second century BCE, which was well known in Late Antiquity. In *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* the story is as follows:

Q. 37:83–98

> 83 *Of his party was also Abraham;*
> 84 *when he came unto his Lord with a pure heart,*
> 85 *when he said to his father and his folk: 'What do you serve?*
> 86 *Is it a calumny, gods apart from God, that you desire?*
> 87 *What think you then of the Lord of all Being?'*
> 88 *And he cast a glance at the stars,*

89 *and he said: 'Surely I am sick.'*
90 *But they went away from him, turning their backs.*
91 *Then he turned to their gods, and said, 'What do you eat?*
92 *What ails you, that you speak not?'*
93 *And he turned upon them smiting them with his right hand.*
94 *Then came the others to him hastening.*
95 *He said, 'Do you serve what you hew,*
96 *and God created you and what you make?'*
97 *They said, 'Build him a building, and cast him into the furnace!'*
98 *They desired to outwit him; so We made them the lower ones.*

The Qur'anic narrative echoes the verdict that it is an abomination to worship idols, which is found in the second commandment of the Decalogue: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above' (Exodus 20:4–5). It projects the specific offence which the messenger suffers from the Meccan pagans' rejection of the proclamation back onto the story of Abraham, who feels offence at his people's idol worship. Abraham's departure from both his people and his father is tantamount to his rejection of the genealogically based principle of clan loyalty, *nasab*. It is hard to overstate the importance of Abraham's abjuration of loyalty to his clan. It is true that the earliest works of Jewish exegesis had already pinpointed Abraham's renunciation of the idolatry regnant in his land as the reason that he left his clan, yet it is only in the Qur'an that the figure of the father is singled out as the one from whom the son turns away. Abraham subsequently establishes a new genealogy grounded in a spiritual *Leitfigur* (leading figure), that is, God, thereby undermining genetic bonds.[29]

It is noteworthy that in the middle Meccan suras a hitherto unknown term is introduced: *dhurriyya*, which, in more modern versions, is normally translated as 'progeny'.[30] The word is derived from *dharra/dhurra*, meaning 'grain seed'. It is phonetically near, though not etymologically related, to the Hebrew word *zeraʿ*, 'seed'; *zeraʿ* is used in the Biblical patriarch narratives as a circumscription of 'progeny'. Thus, the 'seed of Abraham' in particular is the central concept in that divine promise, which in the Biblical text is the essential outcome of Abraham's sacrifice story: the divine blessing promised to Abraham after he showed his willingness to sacrifice his son to God ('That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore', Genesis 22:17).[31]

In the Qur'an the word *dhurriyya*,[32] which is morphologically quite conspicuous, most frequently appears in conjunction with Abraham. The

term, however, was first introduced in the story of Noah in Q. 37:77, which immediately precedes the story of Abraham. The Biblicising concept of 'progeny' enables the Qur'an to get around the standard discourse on sons (*banūn*) and forefathers (*abāʾ*), both of which constituted the backbone of the pagan power paradigm at this time. The pagan discourse of *nasab* is thus superseded by the Biblical discourse of divinely willed procreation. The introduction of the concept of *dhurriyya* in the Qur'an was most likely inspired by the story of Abraham. As in the Biblical account, the divine blessing promised to Abraham and the nigh sacrifice of his son play a key role in the Qur'an's narrative on Abraham. The promise of a son for Abraham had already been announced in the early Meccan *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt* (Q. 51) in Q. 51:28. Communicated somewhat later, the sacrifice story in *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*, as Sinai has suggested,[33] provides a justification for the otherwise unexplained distinction granted to Abraham in *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt* that, despite his old age, he will be given a son:

Q. 37:99–111

99 *He said, 'I am going to my Lord; He will guide me.*
100 *My Lord, give me one of the righteous.'*
101 *Then We gave him the good tidings of a prudent boy;*
102 *and when he had reached the age of* [striving][34] *with him, he said, 'My son, I see in a dream that I shall sacrifice thee; consider, what thinkest thou?' He said, 'My father, do as thou art bidden; thou shalt find me, God willing, one of the steadfast.'*
103 *When they had surrendered, and he flung him upon his brow,*
104 *We called unto him, 'Abraham,*
105 *thou hast confirmed the vision; even so We recompense the good-doers.*
106 *This is indeed the manifest trial.'*
107 *And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice,*
108 *and left for him among the later folk.*
109 *'Peace be upon Abraham!'*
110 *Even so We recompense the good-doers;*
111 *he was among Our believing servants.*

The second narrative focuses on Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son – commonly known as the 'binding of Isaac' (*'aqedah* in Hebrew; see Genesis 22:1–19) – thus highlighting, for a second time, his demonstration of loyalty to the spiritual bond over that of the familial. Unlike Genesis 22:1, in the Qur'an Abraham receives God's order in a dream. The son's readiness (Q. 37:102) to allow himself to be sacrificed – probably, as signalled by the prose syntax, a

somewhat later added clarification – reflects an interpretation of the text established in late antique Jewish tradition.[35] This reading exculpates Abraham from the blame of having wronged his son in preparing to sacrifice him as proof of his personal fidelity to God. Thus, a venerated prophetic figure is cleared of willing involvement in what would have been an otherwise heinous act. The Qur'an's emphasis on the son's calm acceptance of suffering, which lacks any dramatic aspect, may also be understood as a repudiation of the mythical elevation of affliction as a salvific act, such as the Passion in Christianity.[36]

According to the Biblical text, Abraham's consummate willingness to surrender fully to the will of God is rewarded with the promise that his 'seed', his progeny, will be granted privileged standing among the peoples of the word, a standing that is from now on justified by the 'merit of the fathers' (*zekhut avot*): 'And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice' (Genesis 22:18).[37] In contrast, the Qur'anic text does not speak of the descendants' exceptional status. Abraham's son who was involved in the episode is not named even once.[38] Instead, Abraham is rewarded with an honorary blessing, whereby he is established as an exemplary figure. For the new religious community his name is to be accompanied, henceforth, with the eulogy 'peace be upon him' (*'alayhi'l-salām*). Thus, the Qur'an substitutes the type of blessing bestowed by God on Abraham in the Bible; his blessing of a privileged genealogy is replaced with his elevation to the status of a spiritual role model sanctioned by the community.

The New Challenge: The Genealogical Privilege of the Jews (Medinan Period)

The story of Abraham's sacrifice is told only once in the Qur'an. Though not evoked again in the Meccan suras, the narrative acquires a new reading after the *hijra*,[39] where it figures prominently in the Medinan debates concerning the founding of the Kaaba and the establishment of the pilgrimage rituals. The emigration of the community from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE demarcates an important shift. In the Medinan period, many of the older Meccan communications acquired a new religio-political dimension.[40] The new hermeneutic is due to the fact that in Medina, the messenger and his audience no longer find themselves in a pagan–syncretic environment from which they could freely draw on a heterogeneous body of religious knowledge. Rather, they now find themselves in a theologically more demanding society whose prevailing group, the Jewish community, claimed the Biblical heritage (that, up to this point, had been universal intellectual property) as their own legacy

and, thus, the legitimate subject of their particular exegesis. In this context, the sacrifice narrative acquired new religio-political significance for the Qur'anic community; specifically, the sacrifice story – of central importance to both Jews and Christians – had to be revisited.

At this point, some background information may be called for: according to the Qur'an, Abraham's sacrifice did not take place in the Holy Land but in the area around Mecca.[41] It seems that the local tradition had already earlier associated Abraham with the Arabian peninsula and included him as part of the Meccan religious tradition.[42] Therefore, it is hardly astonishing that the *'aqedah*, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son – which had earned the Jews their privileged status and which, in Christian eyes, foreshadowed the Passion of Christ – was also claimed by the Qur'anic community and included in their own narrative. In Medina, the textual event of Abraham's sacrifice was connected with a central religious act celebrated locally, the rite of sacrifice during the *ḥajj*. A number of the extant cultic rites associated with the *ḥajj* that had survived until the time of the Prophet's ministry were integrated into the emerging new religion and, through Qur'anic texts, were stipulated as binding injunctions. The *ḥajj* rites, however, acquired a new meaning, since Abraham was now claimed as the founder of the pilgrimage ritual. This is evident in *Sūrat al-Ḥajj* (Q. 22):

Q. 22:26–8

26 *And when We settled for Abraham the place of the House:*
'Thou shall not associate with Me anything.
And do thou purify My House for those that shall go about it and those that stand,
for those that bow and prostrate themselves;
27 *and proclaim among men the Pilgrimage,*
and they shall come unto thee on foot and upon every lean beast,
they shall come from every deep ravine
28 *that they may witness things profitable to them*
and mention God's Name on days well-known
over such beasts of the flocks as He has provided them:
"So eat thereof, and feed the wretched poor.". . .'

His act of sacrifice prefigures that of the believers during the pilgrimage. Through his willingness to sacrifice his own son, he passes a test which elevates him to the status of imam, role model. The appellation hints at the Biblical promise that he will become 'the father of many nations', but reinterprets the genealogical promise as a spiritual one. According to the Biblical tradition in

Genesis 22:18 and the Jewish tradition of the 'merit of the fathers', Abraham's descendants are expected to use this righteous heritage to their advantage. In the Qur'an, however, after he is elevated to the status of role model, this privilege is denied to them. Abraham's question about the status of his descendants is dismissed in *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q. 2):

Q. 2:124

And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them.
He said, 'Behold, I make you a leader for the people.'
Said he, 'And of my seed?' He said, 'My covenant shall not reach the evildoers.'

Again, his readiness to offer up to God his most beloved child remains his greatest merit and, hence, also serves as the justification for his being upheld as a model of fidelity to God. This distinction had already been accorded to Abraham in an early Meccan sura (in Q. 53:37) but it was only later, in the Medinan period, that the Jewish interpretation of genealogical entitlements – which until then had not been a point of dispute – was rejected.[43] In addition, Abraham sets another precedent that again affirms his status as a role model and which simultaneously depicts the *Urszene* (the original enactment) of the Islamic sacrificial ceremony: the offering of a substitute animal sacrifice. Yet, animal sacrifice in the Qur'an no longer bears theological significance since the ritual of sacrifice itself, which stands at the pinnacle of the pilgrimage, was interpreted anew in Medina. In *Sūrat al-Ḥajj*, although the ritual is sanctioned by a clear Qur'anic directive, it is simultaneously de-mythified and reinterpreted as an act of piety involving *taqwā* (fear of God):

Q. 22:36–7

36 *And the beasts of sacrifice –*
We have appointed them for you as among God's waymarks; therein is good for you. So mention God's Name over them,
standing in ranks then, when their flanks collapse,
eat of them and feed the beggar and the suppliant.
So We have subjected them to you; haply you will be thankful.
37 *The flesh of them shall not reach God, neither their blood,*
but [fear of God][44] from you shall reach Him.

In contrast to Walter Burkert's understanding,[45] the Qur'anic passage does not speak of sacrifice as a mythical act in the way the Bible does. Although the slaughter of animals, as prescribed by old Arabian ritual, is continued, it does not accrue any power for the remission of sins, which was the main purpose of the act according to Biblical tradition. It is only through the individual's fear

of God – the spiritual attitude in which the slaughter is to be performed – that the offering *shall reach Him* (Q. 22:37). The offering, henceforth, becomes an act signalling obedience. All mythical dimensions are expurgated. In the end, only the piety of the individual, their *taqwā*, the counterpart of the late antique notion of *eusebeia*, counts. There is thus no reason for not accrediting the Qur'an, as well, with having facilitated the 'end of sacrifice' that Stroumsa has claimed was implemented by the other late antique religious cultures.

The power of typology

The rite of sacrifice in the Qur'an, despite its de-mythification, is not entirely stripped of its function. By way of a typological association, it acquires new meaning: it is elevated to the rank of an Abrahamic institution. Participants in the cult perform what we may describe as an *imitatio Abrahami* – an inestimable religious upgrading of the pagan pilgrimage rites.

It is the typological interpretation of the Abraham story as the synergetic interaction between father and son that became crucial for shaping the community's identity in Medina. The sacrifice narrative in the Meccan *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* had been told in a non-emphatic, sober voice. There, the nameless individual to be sacrificed is described as prudent (Q. 37:101) and steadfast (Q. 37:102), so that no dramatic mood should arise. Most of all, through the consent of the one to be sacrificed, the sacrificer is emancipated from the tragic nature of his requirement to elevate loyalty to God over loyalty to his own son; any analogy to the Passion of Christ is thus excluded. Equally, the Jewish claim to the 'merit of the Fathers', the Biblical promise that Abraham's descendants will be blessed above all other peoples, is explicitly disavowed in Medina in Q. 2:124, where God states *'My covenant shall not reach the evildoers.'*

Yet, once established, this father–son synergy generated new and important tropes for the emerging monotheist Kaaba cult. In Q. 2:127, Abraham and Ishmael – who had already appeared together in the late Meccan *Sūrat Ibrāhīm* (Q. 14) – are tasked with building the Kaaba, God's House, for the cult's adherents (Q. 2:125). The individual intended for the sacrifice, who was not named in *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*, does not seem to be Isaac, here, but Ishmael, the Arabs' tribal forefather. This, at least, is the understanding suggested by Q. 2:127 since it is Ishmael who appears alongside Abraham in the building of the 'House' and, thus, in the associated sacrifice which is alluded to in the verse's imperative statement, *receive this from us* (*taqabbal minnā*). Abraham's ensuing prayer of the blessing of the House, which is recited by both Abraham and Ishmael during the construction of its foundation walls, is reminiscent of Solomon's dedication prayer upon completion of the temple in 1 Kings

8:22–34.[46] The section culminates in a plea for the completion of the Meccan worship, which before consisted exclusively of the pilgrimage rituals and the gestures of humility accompanying the ritual prayer – self-prostration, and bowing and standing (Q. 2:125). Of importance is the new demand that the worship be completed through a verbal service. This specific plea is a *vaticinatio ex eventu* in the Qur'an, a prayer that has already come to fruition with the messenger's ministry:

Q. 2:127–9:

127 *And when Abraham, and Ishmael with him, raised up the foundations of the House [and he and Ishmael spoke]:*
'Our Lord, receive this [our prayer? our sacrifice?] from us;
Thou art the All-hearing, the All-knowing;
128 *and, our Lord, make us submissive (muslimūna) to Thee,*
and of our seed a nation submissive to Thee (umma muslima);
and show us our holy rites, and turn towards us;
surely Thou turnest, and art All-compassionate;
129 *and, our Lord, do Thou send among them a Messenger,*
one of them, who shall recite to them Thy signs (āyāt),
and teach them the [Scripture] and the Wisdom, and purify them;
Thou art the All-mighty, the All-wise.'

Neither the act of Abraham and Ishmael in constructing the House nor their prayer is found in the Bible. Yet they are certainly not an ad hoc creation of the Qur'an. Rather, as Witztum has convincingly demonstrated,[47] these acts are a Qur'anic restaging of the late antique multifarious vita of Abraham. The two patriarchs' raising of the Kaaba walls and the prayers conducted by them need to be contextualised with Rabbinic and Christian traditions. Whereas what is being constructed in the Qur'an is a sanctuary (a temple, *bayt*), it is explicitly an altar that is central to the Jewish and Christian traditions. Thus, as early as the first/seventh century, the Jewish historian Josephus depicts Isaac as taking part in the construction of the altar upon which he is to be sacrificed.[48] Witztum adduces various Syriac and Greek homilies of the fourth and fifth centuries CE to demonstrate that the son's participation in the preparation of his sacrifice figures at the heart of the Christian tradition. These Christian texts interpret the event typologically: father and son, the 'wise architects of faith', erect an altar on which the salvific sacrifice of the son is to take place. As Witztum shows, this widespread typological version of the sacrifice narrative has left discernible traces in the Qur'an. In light of their wide circulation, these narratives could have functioned as a catalyst for the Qur'anic depiction of the

Kaaba's/the House's construction. The designation of the Kaaba as the House, though obviously no innovation of the Qur'an, as it had already been introduced in one of the earliest suras (Q. 106:3) and frequently used in Medina, evokes Biblical or more precisely post-Biblical associations. It is worth noting that *bayt* is the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew *bayt* which designates the temple. The Jerusalem temple is, again, prefigured by the altar built by Abraham and Isaac. To find here the parallel image of the two patriarchs building the House, *bayt* – and praying to God for the acceptance (of either their prayer or their sacrifice) – suggests that a Biblical scenario has been restaged. The verse would then have to be understood as an allusion to the Abrahamic sacrifice which extends into the building of the Meccan sanctuary. However, one quickly notices that the story in the Qur'an is told without the allegorical features recognisable in Biblical tradition. Its purpose seems to be the foregrounding of that particular son of Abraham – who is not the Biblical elect Isaac – by having him participate in the foundation of the sanctuary. That this is not least a polemical strategy is affirmed by the fact that Ishmael's genealogy is not of theological importance in the Qur'an.[49]

Typological, though not allegorical, references are thus clearly discernible. It should be stressed that the father–son synergy in the Qur'an lacks the mythical dimension with which the story in the two other traditions is imbued by virtue of the weighty notion of redemptive sacrifice. As is often the case in the Qur'an, one can duly speak here of a de-allegorisation, whereby the Qur'an trims a Christologically relevant narrative down to its sheer diegetic plot. Nevertheless, by upholding references to the older text's authority, the basic Biblical plot structure continues to contribute a significant surplus meaning to the Qur'anic story.

A Counter Genealogy: The Prophetic Line of Succession (Medinan Period)

Ancestor worship and the patriarchal tradition of *nasab* are, from the start, negatively connoted in the Qur'an. Thus, in Q. 49:13, cited earlier, the tribes and peoples are downgraded to mere instruments for divine instruction. Pragmatic utility and not prestige, the text suggests, lies at the foundation of tribal organisation. By marginalising both history and tribal history, room was made for a new bond to emerge, one that provided historical depth to the community's new awareness that they were among God's elect, if not genealogically then certainly spiritually. Reuven Firestone suggests that the Qur'anic debate about who constituted the elect likely arose from the disputes, in the Medinan period, between the early Muslims, and the Jews and the

Christians who believed in their communities' exclusive relationship with God.[50] This may well be true for the polemic exchanges, such as those documented in Q. 2:113 and Q. 5:15. It is, however, obvious that a counter-concept to the Jewish and Christian exclusive notion of divine election emerged much earlier. In the Meccan period, the pagans' old tribal model which foregrounded the forefathers was undergoing substitution with a new orientation: for the messenger and his listeners, who considered themselves part of the Biblical history of God's people, ancestral-based family bonds were being replaced with bonds to God's earlier prophets, whom they regarded as their 'spiritual forefathers'.[51] They thus constructed a 'genealogy of elects', a 'prophetic line of succession', as a covenantal model counter to that of tribal genealogy, which allowed them to partake in divine election. In the Medinan *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, the election of these prophets is programmatically laid out:

Q. 3:33–4

33 *God chose Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham*
and the House of [Amram][52] above all beings
34 *the seed (dhurriyya) of one another; God hears, and knows.*

Does this chain hold up to genealogical scrutiny? It is true that Adam and Noah, as the prime fathers of humanity, are genetically related and, by extension, Abraham's descendants are of the same family line. However, the House of Amram ('Imrān in the Qur'an) – that, according to the Qur'an, represents the Holy Family and the Christian line of tradition[53] – includes a list of figures that are well attested in the inter-testamental literature but only loosely related to the Abrahamites – in Q. 3:33–4, they are even seen as a rivalling lineage. *Dhurriyya*, therefore, seems to embody something more than just a genetic relationship. What binds the four names – Adam, Noah, Abraham and Amram – is evidently their status as God's covenantal partners (or in Amram's case, as the father of such a partner). It is noteworthy that the list of names is not new; the figures mentioned here feature, with a slight modification, in earlier Christian covenant lists as well.[54] 'Lineage', distinguished here by the term *dhurriyya*, thus appears to have been sublimated to denote a covenantal bond among the elect. Even though the four figures are depicted as being genealogically related in Q. 3:33–4, the importance of their common descent will conclusively fade away in later suras.[55] After a number of prophets and prophets' families are described as being members of the elect, eventually, in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (Q. 33), the messenger himself is included in the prophetic succession:

Q. 33:7–8

7 *And when We took compact from the Prophets, and from thee* [Muhammad],
and from Noah, and Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, Mary's son;
We took from them a solemn compact
8 *that He might question the truthful concerning their truthfulness;*
and He has prepared for the unbelievers a painful chastisement.

What counts is the divine covenant; the prophetic lineage, the family of the elect, supersedes the worldly bond of the tribe.[56] The Qur'an thus offsets tribal history with a counter history; it does this not by claiming that a new set of elects has replaced the preceding elects from among the Jews and Christians but by establishing a prophetic lineage that all pious believers can claim as their spiritual ancestry.

At the end of this development, Abraham takes the leading role and becomes the spiritual ancestor of a community legitimised through prophets. He presides over a 'House', a faith community no longer exclusively traced to the Jews, as conveyed in the verses of 'prophetic election', Q. 3:33–4. Instead, the new role adopted by Abraham critically engages this verse and even reformulates it as a counter-argument to the Jews' claim to be God's sole elect. In the late Medinan suras, Abraham is depicted as the first pure servant of God (*ḥanīf*) who venerates the one God, still without the guidance of the Mosaic Law. He is effectively an *ummī* (i.e. a just man from among the non-Jewish, the heathen peoples). After the Prophet's death, Abraham, as the ancestral lord of a community, becomes the one Biblical figure whose tradition, the ideal of 'the House of Abraham' (Āl Ibrāhīm), should be continued, and who is thus included in Muslims' quotidian prayers: 'God bless Muhammad and the House of Muhammad, as you blessed Abraham and the House of Abraham!'

In the late Medinan suras, how the House of Abraham is constructed is not explained in any great detail, nor is a word mentioned in reference to his role as the Arabs' tribal ancestor, let alone any privileges to be derived from it. Rather, Abraham is depicted as the messenger's role model. The House of Abraham thus constitutes the nucleus of the Islamic community, which, now at the end of its development, is renewed through the implementation of Abraham's plea unto God for the establishment of a verbal service (Q. 2:128). That community is spiritual, not genealogical, and thereby universally justified. What was once the privilege of Abraham's genealogical descendants (Genesis 22:17) – to benefit from and share in his merits by virtue of his being their ancestor – is now requested in the form of prayer for all pious persons. A

long path has been traversed in this transformation, but, finally, with the positioning of Abraham as the ultimate role model and the founder of the Meccan sanctuary, this Biblical figure – who, erstwhile, had been charged with genealogical associations – turns into the triumphant victor over genealogy.

Conclusion

The Qur'an was communicated in a time when society in the Arabian peninsula was ready to undergo a cultic transformation, that is, to transition from a cult that was based on the practices of pilgrimage and sacrifice to a new religious community at the heart of which were the oral service and notions of individual piety. In the early Meccan period, the group around the messenger had already taken a significant step on the path towards this transformation: their 'care of the self' was clearly reflected in their eschatologically founded sense of individual responsibility for their own deeds. They were distinguished as a new community through their liturgical dedication, their inclination towards asceticism (even monasticism), and, most of all, their adoption of the authority of scripture; in other words, they practised what Stroumsa has termed a communitarian religion. Their pagan opponents were not wholly untouched by this new orientation of Late Antiquity either: the pagan deities lost their status as part of a pantheon and were reinterpreted as angels to fit the new imagination of the transcendent world.[57] The little that remained of the opponents' pagan attitudes was their ancestral pride and their anthropocentric inclination towards a simultaneously heroic and hedonistic lifestyle as configured in tribal ethics, a lifestyle which is clearly documented in ancient Arabic poetry.

As the debate with his detractors over the issue of genealogy intensified in the later Meccan periods, the messenger increasingly referred to Biblical historical precedence in order to spur the emerging Qur'anic community into relinquishing clan-based relationships in favour of relationships based on spiritual bonds. Abraham was deemed the ideal role model to catalyse such a process: he had simultaneously attained a personal relationship with God and freed himself from the shackles of genealogical loyalty. Abraham became a central figure within the new religious community as they disputed with Jewish and Christian learned men in Medina. In the Medinan suras, he is portrayed as the founder of the central sanctuary, achieved through a father-son synergy that had already been prefigured in the earlier Jewish and Christian traditions. His role as founding father of a sanctuary connected to a sacrificial cult was intertwined with a decisive amendment to the tradition. The community's sacrificial offering, which attests to the worshippers' *imitatio*

Abrahami, entailed no mythical implications since it was already understood as a sublimated offering. Moreover, any association of the sacrificial offering with genealogical privilege was blocked, not only for the Jews – whose claim to such an advantage was explicitly denied[58] – but for the Arabs as well, who could have derived from their relation to Abraham a similar claim analogous to the 'merits of the fathers'. The cultic rites which originally confirmed tribal identity now confirmed covenantal identity through the line of Abraham, which could be claimed by all pious individuals. The early society's concern with tribal genealogy was thus disempowered in favour of prophetic genealogy, in which Abraham played the central role. In conclusion, the religion founded through Abraham – in accordance with late antique perceptions – was universal and grounded exclusively in personal piety.

NOTES

1 Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin, 1992), II, pp. 404–41.
2 See James E. Montgomery, 'Dichotomy in Jāhilī Poetry', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 17 (1986), pp. 1–20.
3 Walid Saleh, Review of *Muḥammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet*, by David S. Powers, *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6, no. 6.1/6.2 (2010), p. 263.
4 See Gerald R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750* (London, 1986). See also R. Stephen Humphreys, *Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan: From Arabia to Empire* (Oxford, 2006).
5 See Hamdan, *Studien zur Kanonisierung des Korantexts*.
6 For a presentation of the importance of genealogy before and during the early Islamic period, as well as information about the most important genealogists Muḥammad b. Ṣā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 145/763) and Abū'l-Mundhir Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 203/819 or 205/821), see the introduction to Werner Caskel, *Ǧamharat an-nasab: Das genealogische Werk des Hišām Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Kalbī* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 19–81; see also Franz Rosenthal, 'Nasab', *EI2*, vol. VII, pp. 967–8.
7 See Isabel Toral-Niehoff, 'Der Prophet Muhammad und seine biblische Verwandtschaft: Überlegungen zur Rolle von Genealogie und Identität in der frühen Abbasidenzeit' (Paper presented at the Dahlem School of Humanities, Freie Universität Berlin, 2011) and Caskel, *Gamharat an-nasab*, pp. 39–41.
8 Stroumsa, *Das Ende des Opferkults/The End of Sacrifice*.
9 For a complete analysis of this debate, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 106–12.
10 Ibid., pp. 125–32.
11 Arberry translates this as 'Gross rivalry', but I have modified this as 'Greed for abundance' to mark the referential relation to *Sūrat al-Kawthar*, where he translates *kawthar* as 'abundance'.
12 The 'tombs' most likely refers to the family graveyards familiar in the late antique Near East. Particularly spacious funeral complexes with facilities for communal consumption of meals during a *ziyāra* (pious visitation) have been found in Nabatean Petra and Palestinian Bet Guvrin. For the social importance of the ancestors' tombs in Late Antiquity, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), pp. 284–304. For the generally accepted understanding of the verse as a reference to the death of the addressees, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 125–33.

13 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 49–50.
14 Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Islam: Experience of the Holy and Concept of Man* (Los Angeles, CA, 1966), p. 9.
15 For further discussion of *Sūrat 'Abasa*, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 378–94.
16 For further discussion of the two texts, *Sūrat al-Ma'ārij* and *Sūrat 'Abasa*, see ibid., pp. 437–44.
17 For details, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 431–51.
18 For further analysis of this sura, see ibid., pp. 236–52.
19 See Q. 70:22–9 for an example of a Meccan catalogue of virtues; ibid., pp. 431–51.
20 Arberry translates this as 'land', which is not the exact meaning.
21 Arberry translates this line as *I have consumed wealth abundant*. The translation chosen here is the more literal. For further analyses of this line, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 241–2.
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23 Notably, the Qur'an does not distinguish between the human condition before and after the fall of Adam – a discourse that was of momentous significance to the late antique Church fathers; see ibid., pp. 160–209.
24 See 'Antara's 'Mu'allaqa', v. 40, adduced by Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1974), p. 11.
25 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 672–722.
26 For more details see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 134–40.
27 Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, pp. 90–96.
28 See Klaus Berger, *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, vol. II, no. 3, *Das Buch der Jubiläen* (Gütersloh, 1981), 12:2–4; see also Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 164–6 and 170–71.
29 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 633–7.
30 Arberry, however, translates *dhurriyya* as 'seed' and the King James version of the Bible also translates the Hebrew *zera'* as 'seed'.
31 The 'seed of Abraham' is also the subject of extensive Talmudic discussions. See, for example, the Palestinian Talmud, Nedarim 3:8 in Jacob Neusner, tr., *The Talmud Yerushalmi*, vol. XXIII, *Nedarim* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 66–7.
32 The *-iyya* ending is attached only to three Qur'anic lexemes; in its earliest use it refers to a collective grouping of people.
33 Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, pp. 140–43.
34 Arberry translates *al-sa'y* as 'running', in reference to the pilgrimage rite performed in Mecca. The translation chosen here reflects the most frequent Qur'anic meaning of the root *s-'y*.
35 Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, pp. 126–8; idem, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), pp. 165–78.
36 See St Augustine in Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, p. 128. For more on this adaptation's theological impact and implications, see Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, NY, 1990), pp. 116–51; idem, 'Merit, Mimesis and Martyrdom: Aspects of Shi'ite Meta-Historical Exegesis on Abraham's Sacrifice in Light of Jewish, Christian, and Sunni Muslim Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 1 (1998), pp. 93–116; Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT, 1993); Angelika Neuwirth, 'Biblische Passionen

als Herausforderung: Verhandlung, emotionale Entschärfung und Rekonstruktion des Abrahamsopfers im Koran', in Christoph Wulf, ed., *Emotionen in einer transkulturellen Welt* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 17–27.
37 See also Erik Aurelius, 'Durch den Glauben gehorsam – durch Werke gerecht', in Reinhard G. Kratz and Tilman Nagel, eds., *'Abraham, unser Vater': Die gemeinsamen Wurzeln von Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Göttingen, 2003), pp. 98–111; Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, pp. 135–52; idem, 'Merit, Mimesis and Martyrdom'.
38 A section added later (Q. 37:112–13), not associated with the narrative, appends the announcement of Isaac's birth to the story. This addition emphasises that Isaac will have one righteous son, Jacob, and one 'manifest self-wronger', Esau. It conveys the interpretation, newly adopted in Medina, that Abraham's descendants are not categorically blessed (contrasting that of the Jewish tradition).
39 See Witztum, 'Foundations'; Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*; Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 637–52; Neuwirth, 'Biblische Passionen'.
40 Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 510–60.
41 Reuven Firestone, 'Abraham', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 5–11.
42 Tilman Nagel, 'Der erste Muslim: Abraham in Mekka', in Kratz and Nagel, *'Abraham, unser Vater'*, pp. 133–49; idem, *Muhammad, Leben und Legende* (Munich, 2008).
43 In a still later verse, the 'sonship-fathership' theology of Judaism and Christianity is rejected in general. Saleh quotes Q. 5:18: '*The Jews and the Christians say: "We are the children of God and His loved ones." Say: "Why then does He punish you for your sins? Surely you are mortals of His own creation . . ."*'; Saleh, Review, p. 253.
44 Arberry translates *taqwā* as 'godliness'.
45 Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen* (Berlin, 1972), p. 19.
46 Angelika Neuwirth, 'The Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Islam', in Nitza Rosovsky, ed., *City of the Great King: Jerusalem, from David to the Present* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), pp. 93–116 and pp. 483–95.
47 Witztum, 'Foundations'.
48 Ibid., p. 29.
49 See Caskel, *Gamharat an-nasab*, p. 39.
50 Reuven Firestone, 'Is There a Notion of "Divine Election" in the Qur'ān?' in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, p. 408.
51 Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 365–7.
52 Arberry translates this as 'Imrān.
53 Neuwirth, 'House of Abraham'.
54 See the prophetic line of succession of Buṭrus al-Bayt Ra'si (Pseudo-Eutychios, third/ninth century), cited by Samir Khalil Samir, 'The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān: A Reflection', in Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, pp. 141–62, which conveniently replaces the House of Amram with Moses; see also Neuwirth, 'House of Abraham'.
55 See the Medinan amendment to the middle Meccan text in Q. 19:58.
56 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 230–34.
57 Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 642–85.
58 See Q. 2:124 and Q. 3:65–8, and the polemic against Jews and Christians summarised by Firestone in 'Divine Election', p. 408.

13 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 49–50.
14 Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Islam: Experience of the Holy and Concept of Man* (Los Angeles, CA, 1966), p. 9.
15 For further discussion of *Sūrat 'Abasa*, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 378–94.
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36 See St Augustine in Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, p. 128. For more on this adaptation's theological impact and implications, see Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, NY, 1990), pp. 116–51; idem, 'Merit, Mimesis and Martyrdom: Aspects of Shi'ite Meta-Historical Exegesis on Abraham's Sacrifice in Light of Jewish, Christian, and Sunni Muslim Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 1 (1998), pp. 93–116; Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT, 1993); Angelika Neuwirth, 'Biblische Passionen als Herausforderung: Verhandlung, emotionale Entschärfung und Rekonstruktion des Abrahamsopfers im Koran', in Christoph Wulf, ed., *Emotionen in einer transkulturellen Welt* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 17–27.

37 See also Erik Aurelius, 'Durch den Glauben gehorsam – durch Werke gerecht', in Reinhard G. Kratz and Tilman Nagel, eds., *'Abraham, unser Vater': Die gemeinsamen Wurzeln von Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Göttingen, 2003), pp. 98–111; Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, pp. 135–52; idem, 'Merit, Mimesis and Martyrdom'.
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39 See Witztum, 'Foundations'; Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*; Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 637–52; Neuwirth, 'Biblische Passionen'.
40 Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 510–60.
41 Reuven Firestone, 'Abraham', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 5–11.
42 Tilman Nagel, 'Der erste Muslim: Abraham in Mekka', in Kratz and Nagel, *'Abraham, unser Vater'*, pp. 133–49; idem, *Muhammad, Leben und Legende* (Munich, 2008).
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44 Arberry translates *taqwā* as 'godliness'.
45 Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen* (Berlin, 1972), p. 19.
46 Angelika Neuwirth, 'The Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Islam', in Nitza Rosovsky, ed., *City of the Great King: Jerusalem, from David to the Present* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), pp. 93–116 and pp. 483–95.
47 Witztum, 'Foundations'.
48 Ibid., p. 29.
49 See Caskel, *Gamharat an-nasab*, p. 39.
50 Reuven Firestone, 'Is There a Notion of "Divine Election" in the Qur'ān?' in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, p. 408.
51 Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 365–7.
52 Arberry translates this as 'Imrān.
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54 See the prophetic line of succession of Buṭrus al-Bayt Ra'si (Pseudo-Eutychios, third/ninth century), cited by Samir Khalil Samir, 'The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān: A Reflection', in Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, pp. 141–62, which conveniently replaces the House of Amram with Moses; see also Neuwirth, 'House of Abraham'.
55 See the Medinan amendment to the middle Meccan text in Q. 19:58.
56 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 230–34.
57 Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 642–85.
58 See Q. 2:124 and Q. 3:65–8, and the polemic against Jews and Christians summarised by Firestone in 'Divine Election', p. 408.

13 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 49–50.
14 Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Islam: Experience of the Holy and Concept of Man* (Los Angeles, CA, 1966), p. 9.
15 For further discussion of *Sūrat 'Abasa*, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 378–94.
16 For further discussion of the two texts, *Sūrat al-Ma'ārij* and *Sūrat 'Abasa*, see ibid., pp. 437–44.
17 For details, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 431–51.
18 For further analysis of this sura, see ibid., pp. 236–52.
19 See Q. 70:22–9 for an example of a Meccan catalogue of virtues; ibid., pp. 431–51.
20 Arberry translates this as 'land', which is not the exact meaning.
21 Arberry translates this line as *I have consumed wealth abundant*. The translation chosen here is the more literal. For further analyses of this line, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 241–2.
22 It is noteworthy that the Qur'anic message at no point rejects the begetting of children so vehemently disputed in the patristic literature of the third to the fifth century CE, but acknowledges marital life and the begetting of offspring as the basis for the existence and survival of the *polis*. For a discussion of the patristic discourse, see Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 5–32.
23 Notably, the Qur'an does not distinguish between the human condition before and after the fall of Adam – a discourse that was of momentous significance to the late antique Church fathers; see ibid., pp. 160–209.
24 See 'Antara's 'Mu'allaqa', v. 40, adduced by Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, NJ, 1974), p. 11.
25 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 672–722.
26 For more details see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 134–40.
27 Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, pp. 90–96.
28 See Klaus Berger, *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, vol. II, no. 3, *Das Buch der Jubiläen* (Gütersloh, 1981), 12:2–4; see also Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 164–6 and 170–71.
29 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 633–7.
30 Arberry, however, translates *dhurriyya* as 'seed' and the King James version of the Bible also translates the Hebrew *zera'* as 'seed'.
31 The 'seed of Abraham' is also the subject of extensive Talmudic discussions. See, for example, the Palestinian Talmud, Nedarim 3:8 in Jacob Neusner, tr., *The Talmud Yerushalmi*, vol. XXIII, *Nedarim* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 66–7.
32 The *-iyya* ending is attached only to three Qur'anic lexemes; in its earliest use it refers to a collective grouping of people.
33 Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, pp. 140–43.
34 Arberry translates *al-sa'y* as 'running', in reference to the pilgrimage rite performed in Mecca. The translation chosen here reflects the most frequent Qur'anic meaning of the root *s-'y*.
35 Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, pp. 126–8; idem, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), pp. 165–78.
36 See St Augustine in Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, p. 128. For more on this adaptation's theological impact and implications, see Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, NY, 1990), pp. 116–51; idem, 'Merit, Mimesis and Martyrdom: Aspects of Shi'ite Meta-Historical Exegesis on Abraham's Sacrifice in Light of Jewish, Christian, and Sunni Muslim Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 1 (1998), pp. 93–116; Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT, 1993); Angelika Neuwirth, 'Biblische Passionen als Herausforderung: Verhandlung, emotionale Entschärfung und Rekonstruktion des Abrahamsopfers im Koran', in Christoph Wulf, ed., *Emotionen in einer transkulturellen Welt* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 17–27.

37 See also Erik Aurelius, 'Durch den Glauben gehorsam – durch Werke gerecht', in Reinhard G. Kratz and Tilman Nagel, eds., *'Abraham, unser Vater': Die gemeinsamen Wurzeln von Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Göttingen, 2003), pp. 98–111; Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, pp. 135–52; idem, 'Merit, Mimesis and Martyrdom'.
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3

Glimpses of Paradise in the World and Lost Aspects of the World in the Hereafter: Two Qur'anic Re-readings of Biblical Psalms*

Introduction

ESCHATOLOGY IS arguably one of the central discourses of the Qur'an. Its prominence is largely due to the challenge encountered by the Qur'anic community to overcome an extremely powerful pagan ideology, so to speak, that was pervasive in the Arabian milieu: the ethos of *muruwwa*, a heroic and at the same time hedonistic lifestyle embodied by the Bedouin hero and portrayed by the ancient Arab poet. *Muruwwa*, expressing itself in excessive hospitality, extravagance, grandiloquence, boastful attachment to one's clan and tribe, and extreme prowess in battle, was particularly powerful due to its artistic representation in the most prestigious literary genre, the ancient Arabic *qaṣīda*.[1] This anthropocentric understanding of the world, voiced in poetry, is taken up as a primary target of the early Qur'anic message. Excessive worldliness, that is, the unlimited confidence of man in his abilities, is countered in the Qur'an by a new theocentric outlook centring on eschatology. Eschatology in the Qur'an is projected through multiple images that crystallised into an elaborate drama during the first Meccan period of the Prophet's ministry.[2] Yet, although the diverse acts of this drama staging the events leading up to the Day of Judgement – such as the cosmic cataclysm, the awakening of the dead and the ensuing punishment of the sinners in hell – all play an important role in the message of eschatology, they are secondary in importance to the core piece of Qur'anic eschatology, the image of eternal bliss in paradise.

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Psalmen – im Koran neu gelesen (Ps. 104 und 136)', in Dirk Hartwig, Walter Homolka, Michael Marx and Angelika Neuwirth, eds., *'Im vollen Licht der Geschichte': Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung – Ex Oriente Lux*, Bd. 8, pp. 157–90. © 2008 by Ergon-Verlag GmBH Würzburg, Germany.

As a prevalent Qur'anic motif, paradise not only exerted a sustained influence on both the spiritual life and the sociopolitical outlook of the Prophet's contemporaries and the later recipients of the Qur'an,[3] it also inspired classical Arabic literature and art. Whereas the complex reception history of the Qur'anic paradise has been amply studied, the particular literary shape of the Qur'anic paradise itself has seldom been submitted to investigation. Traditional Islamic scholars as well as Western critics have usually taken the numerous impressive descriptions of paradisiacal scenarios simply for a Qur'anic peculiarity, an iconographic given, a literary *fait accompli*. They usually do not enquire into these narratives' possible dialectical relation vis-à-vis earlier images of paradise,[4] let alone their ideological function within the Qur'anic message. Instead, a teleological approach is pursued: it is not late antique texts that are consulted to explain the unique features of the Qur'anic paradise but Islamic exegetical ones; these, however, are built on a much later and a very different vision of the world and the hereafter.[5]

Though it is true that this kind of anachronistic approach is pervasive in contemporary scholarship, there are still remnants of an earlier, more methodologically sound, scholarly tradition extant. This latter tradition, which was established in the nineteenth century, succeeded during the short period of one century – between 1833 and 1933 – in laying the foundation for a historically conscious model of Qur'anic studies, both in terms of methodology and the selection of comparative material. This scholarly tradition, initiated by Geiger in 1833,[6] focused on late antique intertexts of the Qur'an, primarily those from Jewish and Christian traditions but also those from pagan Arabian traditions. Horovitz's ground-breaking essay 'Das Koranische Paradies' (1923) opened scholars' eyes to the multiple literary layers underlying the Qur'anic configuration of the eschatological beyond. Horovitz' work was continued by Heinrich Speyer (1931) who threw light on the primordial paradise by submitting its narrative references to a source-critical investigation.[7] Modern contributions on the subject – by Saleh,[8] Crone,[9] Reynolds[10] and the present writer[11] – have proceeded in a similar vein, though with very different preconceptions concerning the Qur'an as either mere source material or literary artefact. The historical approach, based on the search for late antique texts that are echoed in the Qur'an, is being pursued systematically in the recently established Corpus Coranicum project,[12] which, however, goes an important step further. Beyond identifying formal and semantic convergences between pre-Qur'anic and Qur'anic texts, it endeavours to reconstruct the peculiar negotiation processes that appear to be mirrored in the individual Qur'anic reflections on the earlier Jewish, Christian and pagan traditions. It thus pays attention to the social context in which the individual

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Qur'anic reworkings of Biblical and post-Biblical texts occurred in order to draw conclusions about their theological and, moreover, educational function in the process of the emergence of the Qur'anic community.

This chapter's exploration of the Qur'anic paradise will adhere to the same approach. Until now, the striking differences between the Qur'anic conception of paradise and that reflected in the Jewish and Christian texts have not been investigated, either with regard to their historical foundations or to their impact on the Qur'anic community. The Jewish and Christian traditions – essentially following the narrative of Genesis 2 – focus on the primordial paradise (i.e. Eden). The Qur'an, however, first and foremost, presents the paradise of the hereafter – a utopian place awaiting the just – and provides only a few details about the lost primordial garden, whose inhabitants, Adam and Eve, become significant only in the later stage of the Qur'an's development. It is, thus, less the primordial than the eschatological paradise that the Qur'an depicts in vivid and sensual detail.[13] It is true that Judaism and Christianity did also develop images of an eschatological beyond:[14] late antique Jewish apocalyptic literature as well as Rabbinic writings speak about a transcendent abode awaiting the just. The eschatological encounter between mankind and the Divine was even prefigured in a number of ascent accounts ascribed to individual elects who had ascended to heaven and returned as witnesses of particular spiritual experiences in the heavenly abodes.[15] Yet, their testimonies do not always contain images of a garden, and if they do, these images are little more than projections of an earlier primordial paradise and do not possess iconographical traits of their own. Though certainly a theologically significant phenomenon, the Jewish and Christian eschatological paradise is primarily a place where the just will be assembled to enjoy the radiance of the divine presence.[16] In Christian tradition, paradise is charged with a particular theological function: to repair the broken image of Adam's paradise where his primordial transgression, which stained mankind with the birthmark of original sin, had occurred. In contrast, the Qur'anic eschatological paradise (*janna*) is an ideal space of bliss in its own right, disconnected from the locus of Adam's transgression. Only in later periods does this depiction become loosely reconnected to that mythical scenario.

A close examination of the tropological similarities between the Qur'an and other extant texts at the time of the Qur'an's transmission will allow us to clarify the specific function of the descriptions of paradise in the Qur'an. We ought to imagine that the Qur'an – or rather the community of the Prophet – readapted earlier pagan and monotheistic images not by simply copying such images but by negotiating them and occasionally expunging from them their allegorical dimensions.

It is noteworthy that the Qur'anic reconfiguration of images which takes place during the Meccan period is carried out without any polemical bias vis-à-vis the earlier traditions, which are not rejected but rather amalgamated into a new overall imagery. Paradisiacal imagery for the Qur'anic community acquired surplus momentum, however. First of all, the narratives of paradise were crucial for promoting the new eschatological theology.[17] However, they also possessed another, even more momentous, function which has until now been ignored in scholarship: they served to counterbalance and, ultimately, replace the deeply pessimistic perceptions of reality prevailing in the Qur'an's pagan milieu. Such perceptions pervade the *nasīb* – the introductory part of the *qaṣīda* – staging the ancient Arab poet's lament about the uncertainties in life and the transitoriness of human achievements in particular. Qur'anic depictions of paradise, as will be demonstrated, invert the constitutive imagery of pagan thought by rearranging its elements to form the counter-image of everlasting bliss. The desire to recover lost aspects of the earthly realm in the hereafter is certainly the main focus of the Qur'anic presentations of paradise, yet the Qur'an also provides images of the world which occasionally offer glimpses of paradise. Both these references to paradise are conveyed through Qur'anic texts which draw upon individual psalms.

The Meccan Suras and the Psalms

The early Qur'anic community was familiar with the psalms as a partial corpus of the Bible. Q. 17:55, a verse in the middle Meccan *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, mentions a scripture ascribed to David called *zabūr* (Psalter).[18] The word *zabūr* also appears in another middle Meccan sura, *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'* (Q. 21), in Q. 21:105, and in a Medinan sura, *Sūrat al-Nisā'* (Q. 4), in Q. 4:163. In these representations, the psalms, strictly speaking, thus coexist as a scripture in and of themselves alongside the Torah given to Moses and the Gospel related to Jesus, yet they are not accorded the same status as the two later scriptures, as they are not presented as authoritative precursors to the new revelation; similarly, David is of lesser significance in the Qur'an than Moses or Jesus. Only one Qur'anic verse adopts the phrasing of a particular psalm. Q. 21:105: *For We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance, 'The earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants'* (*wa-laqad katabnā fi'l-zabūri min ba'di'l-dhikri anna'l-arḍa yarithuhā 'ibādiya'l-ṣaliḥūn*) is reminiscent of Psalms 37:9, 11 and 29.[19] Even more, however, than through their textual form, the psalms are visible in the Qur'an through their use of liturgical speech. Indeed, many of the early suras sound like distant echoes of the psalms, such as the 'consolation suras' *Sūrat al-Kawthar* and *Sūrat al-Sharḥ*; and the Qur'anic hymns, such as *Sūrat*

al-Aʿlā and *Sūrat al-ʿAlaq*. Moreover, the 'refrain suras', such as *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* and *Sūrat al-Wāqiʿa*, recall particular psalms which take the form of a litany. Though Christian venues of transmission suggest themselves – the liturgy of the Syrian churches, widely shaped by the psalms, would not have been alien amongst those in the milieu of the Qur'an[20] – the possibility that Jewish liturgical traditions exerted an impact on the Arabian peninsula should not be excluded either. Since there is no evidence of written Arabic translations of the psalms in the pre-Islamic period,[21] we ought to assume that individual psalms were transmitted to their Arabic-speaking recipients orally, maybe even in a language other than Arabic. The etymology of the word *sūra* may even corroborate this hypothesis. It has lately been related to the Syriac word *shūrayā* (beginning), which is used in a liturgical context to refer to the introductory recitation of short verses from the psalms preceding the reading of Biblical core texts.[22] Was the liturgical element *shūrayā* the model, in terms of both designation and function, for the early Meccan suras?

It is striking that the particular type of piety relying on the psalms is apparent from the very beginning of the Qur'an's genesis.[23] The liturgical formulas from both the Jewish and Christian contexts which were likely to have been instrumental in that transmission process have been identified by Baumstark.[24] What we must assume to have been current in pre-Islamic Arabia are not fixed texts, however, but a common liturgical language that was promoted through oral tradition and which, in only a few cases, resulted in the unambiguous reflection of individual psalms in the Qur'an. As a rule, this language is limited to a particular type of imagery or a particular cluster of ideas. As is well known, the psalms are – in contrast to the Qur'an – immediate expressions of the way of life in an agricultural society, abounding with images derived from nature. Without the assumption of intertextuality between the psalms and the Qur'an, it would be hard to account for the presence in the Qur'an of such nature imagery as the fruit-bearing tree in Q. 14:24–6 or the blades of grass alluded to in Q. 105:5. Their function is, however, different: blessings of nature in Qur'anic contexts are, as a rule, viewed as gifts necessitating human gratefulness,[25] while in the psalms they evoke admiration for God's majesty.

Yet, the images of nature convey certain figures of thought that are similar in both textual corpora, such as the ability to persevere as a result of God's grace; the duty to utter praise; the impossibility of hiding one's deeds from God; the concept of the permanently ongoing divine trial but God's guidance as well, among others. In both texts there is frequent reference to nocturnal wakes and prayer, and to enduring faithfulness in the face of dissent. Common topics of the speaker/transmitter of both textual corpora are human weakness and mankind's liability to succumb to hubris and self-deceit.[26] Most striking, though,

is that the psalmist and the transmitter of the Qur'an are deeply stirred by their personal closeness to God,[27] whose face (*wajh/pānīm*) they feel is turned towards them.[28]

The observation has long been made that the early Meccan suras are structurally similar to the polythematic psalms.[29] The fact that they are intended to be used as liturgical texts and thus, like the psalms, to be performed (i.e. to be chanted) is obvious from their composition. Several early suras, such as Q. 73:1–8 and Q. 74:1–7, even point to their recitation during a vigil, making a connection between the chanting of suras and the receiving of new revelations. Regarding their literary shape and their function, the Meccan texts are thus much more closely related to the psalms than, as is usually held, to the Bible as such. Yet, these early Qur'anic texts are in no way a simple paraphrase of the psalms: their vision of history, for instance, is completely different. While many psalms are concerned with looking back at the divine interventions in history, the emerging world view in the early Qur'an relies far less on history than on a new eschatological perception of time as linear. This new Qur'anic orientation was to be communicated to listeners, many of whom, it is likely, still adhered to cyclical perceptions of time, which we see clearly expressed in pre-Islamic poetry.[30] Moreover, the Meccan suras seem to reject an earlier ancient Arab stance vis-à-vis the past that staunchly viewed history as a period of loss, bearing no promise of a future. Instead, the early suras are oriented towards the future, promoting the need to be mindful of the inevitable judgement.

As a consequence, the eminent presence of the Day of Judgement instils an eschatological dimension in the Qur'anic imagery. Thus, perceptions of nature, presented in what is commonly designated as the nature *āyāt*,[31] are usually not meant to elicit praise of God but to evoke a sense of awe at God's omnipotence, which is a precondition for the acceptance of the core message of the early Qur'an, that is, the resurrection of the dead on Judgement Day. The similarities and differences between both corpora, of course, become most evident in those cases where the psalms and the Qur'an exhibit intertextuality extending over long sections of texts. Two such cases are discussed in this chapter, where the parallels between *Sūrat al-Naba'* (Q. 78) and Psalms 104, and more extensively between *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* and Psalms 136, are highlighted.

Glimpses of Paradise in the World

Q. 78:1–17 and Psalms 104:1–8, 13–23

Whereas the relationship between *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* and Psalms 136 has been repeatedly noted,[32] that between *Sūrat al-Naba'* (Q. 78:1–17) and Psalms 104

(Psalms 104:1–8, 13–23) seems to have escaped scholarly attention, although other instances of intertextuality between this psalm and the Qur'an have been identified in Speyer's list of Biblical narratives in the Qur'an.[33] The numerous traces of this psalm in the Qur'an, only some of which can be discussed below, can be explained by its prominence in the Jewish and Christian liturgy.[34] The Qur'anic text, divided into its thematic clusters, reads as follows:

Q. 78:1–17

Part I: Controversy concerning eschatology

1 *Of what do they question one another?*
2 *Of the mighty tiding*
3 *whereon they are at variance.*
4 *No indeed; they shall soon know!*
5 *Again, no indeed; they shall soon know!*

Part II: Nature *āyāt*

6 *Have We not made the earth as a cradle*
7 *and the mountains as pegs?*
8 *And [have We not] created you in pairs,*
9 *and . . . appointed your sleep for a rest;*
10 *and . . . appointed night for a garment,*
11 *and . . . appointed day for a livelihood.*
12 *And [have We not] built above you seven strong ones,*
13 *and . . . appointed a blazing lamp*
14 *and have sent down out of the rainclouds water cascading*
15 *that We may bring forth thereby grain and plants,*
16 *and gardens luxuriant.*

Part III: Certainty of Judgement Day

17 *Surely the Day of Decision is an appointed time . . .*

Sūrat al-Naba' is among the 'eschatological suras' frequently represented in early Mecca.[35] Part I (Q. 78:1–5) begins with a rhetorical question whose topic was obviously contentious for the listeners at that time. Though this topic is not named, it is obvious that – in view of the centrality of eschatology in the Meccan texts – *the mighty tiding* (*al-naba' al-'aẓīm*) referred to in Q. 78:2 is an allusion to Judgement Day, an idea continued in the ensuing warning addressed to the sceptics (Q. 78:4–5). Part II (Q. 78:6–16) refers back to the beginning dialectically: it catalogues the divine acts of creation using nature *āyāt* with the aim of erasing the listeners' doubts concerning the divine omnipotence which prevented them from believing in the Day of Judgement. Part III (Q. 78:17) speaks of the certainty that Judgement Day will come, thus

continuing the eschatological theme. This sura offers one of the very rare cases in which a non-narrative Biblical intertext is clearly discernible, since the nature *āyāt* of Part II is evidently a reference to Psalms 104:

Psalms 104:1–8, 13–23

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty.
2 Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain:
3 Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind:
4 Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire:
5 Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever.
6 Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains.
7 At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away.
8 They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them.

. . .

13 He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.
14 He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth;
15 And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.
16 The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted;
17 Where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house.
18 The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies.
19 He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down.
20 Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.
21 The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God.
22 The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens.
23 Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.

(The text of the psalm continues as a hymn).

Although the praises enumerated in the psalm form an integral part of an extended hymn while in the sura they are framed by eschatological sections, both texts display significant common traits. The most striking of these is the image of the earth as a tent (Q. 78:6–7), an image that never recurs in the Qur'an. In both texts the earthly tent is presented as firmly relying on its beams, *mekhoneha* (Psalms 104:3; see also pegs, Q. 78:7), and having the sky as its roof, *yeri'ah* (Psalms 104:2). In both texts, the image of the tent is not continuous throughout, however; in the sura, the reference to the *seven strong ones* (i.e. the seven planets) with the sun as their lamp (Q. 78:12–13) does not fit with the tent metaphor and generates tension. Similarly, in the psalm, there is discordance between the tent metaphor and the perception of the cosmos as God's multi-storied house, from whose upper chambers, *'aliyot* (Psalms 104:3, 13) He provides for creation.[36] This blatantly anthropomorphic latter image is not reflected in the Qur'an, perhaps the result of an exegetical correction, so to speak. In both texts, also, a number of natural phenomena are presented as divine gifts, such as the clouds alluded to in Psalms 104:13 and specifically referred to in Q. 78:14, the mountains (Psalms 104:8, Q. 78:7), the sun (Psalms 104:19, 22 and Q. 78:13: *a blazing lamp*), the night (Psalms 104:20, Q. 78:10), and the crops that provide mankind and their animals with sustenance (Psalms 104:14, Q. 78:15–16). In both texts, the time for mankind to earn their living is daylight (Psalms 104:23, Q. 78:11) – an idea which is not mentioned equally expressively anywhere else in the Qur'an.

However, regarding the function of the night, the texts diverge. The sura mentions, in addition to the data adduced in the psalm, the idea that humans have been created as gendered pairs (Q. 78:8) for whom the night serves as a space for their privacy, probably an allusion to their sexual fulfilment; in the psalm, however, there are no such overtones. This Qur'anic idea – which may, again, be considered a kind of exegetical correction – is expressed in a strikingly novel metaphor: the human pair is presented as clad in the cosmic garment of night (Q. 78:10). The mention of such a garment reappears only once more, in Q. 25:47, where it is clearly a reference to *Sūrat al-Naba'*. Such a cosmic metaphor is, however, applied in the psalm to praise the divine majesty (Psalms 104:1–2).

Perhaps the most noteworthy difference between *Sūrat al-Naba'* and Psalms 104 lies in the kind of worlds they describe. The psalm is mostly written in the present tense and illustrates an extensive mythical tableau in which the divine persona holds court: God moves along in a heavenly chariot, personally shapes the living conditions of His creation and takes care of their subsistence.

Creation itself appears to be set in motion by His presence: wild beasts come forward, asking Him for food, and retreat (Psalms 104:20–2). One might trace in this text the late antique topos of the *locus amoenus* (the 'pleasant space', an idealised place of comfort often serving as the background of idyllic narratives).[37] In the psalm, the description of ideal nature is delivered in praise of God. This same observation cannot be made for the sura. Though the human habitat is described there as harmonious, it does not crystallise into a coherent scenario. As the paraenetic form of the rhetorical question demonstrates, the description of nature is meant to be a reference to a theological message. In *Sūrat al-Naba'*, the divine creation is no longer in progress but appears to have been long concluded. God is no longer present as the agent of creation but has become a speaker who recounts His own – long achieved – acts of creation in the past tense. All the Divine's precautions for His creation are presented as frozen in a timeless divine speech. The 'image in motion' presented in the psalm has become static in the sura. The eschatological tension created by the new Qur'anic context has reconfigured the psalm's narrative account of creation. In the Qur'an, creation has become part of a meta-discourse on the controversy about the end of time; it is a response to the topic of the Day of Judgement that had been raised at the beginning of the sura. The creation accounts serve to remove doubts about the divine omnipotence, thus encouraging the listeners to make the right decision. The Qur'anic section, unlike the section in the psalm, is not a hymn; it is not the expression of spontaneous emotion but a reminder, an argument directed towards a definite conclusion.

The sura may be regarded as being in dialogue with the psalm and, perhaps, even a kind of exegesis of it based on a change of perspective. In the psalm, it is the pious observer who looks up to the heavenly heights in amazement, praising the achievements of God. In the sura, it is God himself who speaks, looking down from heaven on the earthly scenario and recounting the care He has taken of those in His creation. The monumental scope of the psalm has been transformed into more human-sized proportions in the sura; the focus is not on transcendent glory but on mankind's everyday needs, thus all the anthropomorphisms of God have been eradicated. The psalm restages divine creation whereas in the Qur'anic text God, in His own voice, reminds us of His acts of creation that are but the prelude to the ultimate day of reckoning. Creation in the Meccan suras is not an ongoing event but has been converted into speech and, thus, into an *āya*, a sign, of the inevitability of passing time and a reminder that the world too will come to an end.

Lost Aspects of the World Restored in the Hereafter

The re-reading of a complete psalm in the Qur'an: *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* and Psalms 136

The Qur'an displays a complex relationship with history.[38] The topic of the effaced abodes of earlier inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula is a major one in the early Meccan suras.[39] Descriptions of ruined abodes (*diyār*) are common in ancient Arabic poetry,[40] where they are usually evoked within the elegiac introductory section of the *qaṣīda*. At the beginning of these poems, the ancient poet laments the loss of his loved ones and the thriving society of which he was once a part but whose campsites now lie in ruins. Questioning the ruins as to the fate of those who had once filled the place with delightful pastimes, aesthetic refinements and erotic pleasures, the poet receives no response. No message other than the inevitability of human transitoriness is to be gleaned from the ruined abodes that represent the remains of a human culture which had been obliterated by nature. In contrast to this vision, the Qur'anic image of the ruined abodes offers a meaningful message: the destruction observed is no haphazard fate but is part of a divine plan. It has occurred to punish evildoers who had prevented other members of their society from heeding the call of their respective messengers to serve the one God. Though there are many assertions of God's positive intervention in human affairs throughout history, particularly in the later suras that deal with the fate of the Israelites, in the Qur'an confidence in God arises foremost from His deeds in creation and His power of resurrection rather than from His works in history.

The Qur'anic stance is thus opposite to the Biblical view of history which, we may assume, would have been familiar to the Qur'anic community. One Biblical text in particular that focuses on history must have been instrumental in shaping the community's theological awareness, since it is reflected in the Qur'an itself. This text is Psalms 136 which is remodelled in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*. The Qur'an's new emphasis on humanity's future rather than history, that supersedes the Biblical vision, is not only a rejection of the latter but a response to a major question raised in ancient Arabic poetry.[41] The Qur'anic view of history inverts the pessimistic stance held in popular Hellenistic philosophy that continued to prevail in the Near East and that had ultimately found its way into the early Arabic *qaṣīdas*. Though such pessimism is not alien to some Biblical texts either, it is, however, in stark contrast to the attitude expressed in the psalms. The Qur'an is thus in dialogue with two different cultural traditions, debating and finally replacing their respective positions.

Sūrat al-Raḥmān and Psalms 136 share a number of common characteristics, primarily their striking antiphonal speech and the employment of a refrain. Yet, the sura is not just a text replete with references to the psalm, but an intentional re-reading of it. The greatest similarity between the two texts is found in their refrains; these are, however, not exactly identical. In the psalm the refrain is a hymnal phrase: 'for his mercy endureth for ever (*ki le-olam hasdo*)'; in the Qur'an it is a rhetorical question posed to two groups – a group of men and a group of jinn – as explicitly stated in Q. 55:14–15: *khalaqa'l-insāna min ṣalṣālin ka'l-fakhkhār; wa khalaqa'l-jānna min mārijin min nār*. They both serve as witnesses to the truth that there are signs of God in the real world that are perceivable by His creatures and that should be heeded. *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* can be divided into three thematic parts.

Q. 55

Part I: Creation

1 *The All-merciful*
2 *has taught the Qur'an.*
3 *He created man*
4 *and He has taught him the Explanation.*
5 *The sun and the moon to a reckoning,*
6 *and the stars and the trees bow themselves;*
7 *and heaven – He raised it up, and set the Balance.*
8 *(Transgress not in the Balance,*
9 *and weigh with justice, and skimp not in the Balance.)*
10 *And earth – He set it down for all beings,*
11 *therein fruits, and palm-trees with sheaths,*
12 *and grain in the blade, and fragrant herbs.*
13 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*

Part II: Rejection of God's generosity

14 *He created man of a clay like the potter's,*
15 *and He created the jinn of a smokeless fire.*
16 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
17 *Lord of the Two Easts, Lord of the Two Wests,*
18 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
19 *He let forth the two seas that meet together,*
20 *between them a barrier they do not overpass.*
21 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
22 *From them come forth the pearl and the coral.*
23 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*

24 *His too are the ships that run, raised up in the sea like land-marks.*
25 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
26 *All that dwells upon the earth is perishing,*
27 *yet still abides the Face of thy Lord, majestic, splendid.*
28 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
29 *Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth implore Him; every day He is upon some labour.*
30 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
31 *We shall surely attend to you at leisure, you weight and you weight!*
32 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
33 *O tribe of jinn and of men, if you are able to pass through the confines of heaven and earth, pass through them! You shall not pass through except with an authority.*
34 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
35 *Against you shall be loosed a flame of fire, and molten brass; and you shall not be helped.*
36 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*

Part III: Eschatology

37 *And when heaven is split asunder, and turns crimson like red leather –*
38 *O which of our Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
39 *on that day none shall be questioned about his sin, neither man nor jinn.*
40 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
41 *The sinners shall be known by their mark, and they shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet.*
42 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
43 *This is Gehenna, that sinners cried lies to;*
44 *they shall go round between it and between hot, boiling water.*
45 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
46 *But such as fears the Station of his Lord, for them shall be two gardens –*
47 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
48 *abounding in branches –*
49 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
50 *therein two fountains of running water –*
51 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
52 *therein of every fruit two kinds –*
53 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
54 *reclining upon couches lined with brocade, the fruits of the gardens nigh to gather –*

55 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
56 *therein maidens restraining their glances, untouched before them by any man or jinn –*
57 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
58 *lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral –*
59 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
60 *Shall the recompense of goodness be other than goodness?*
61 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
62 *And besides these shall be two gardens –*
63 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
64 *green, green pastures –*
65 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
66 *therein two fountains of gushing water –*
67 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
68 *therein fruits, and palm-trees, and pomegranates –*
69 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
70 *therein maidens good and comely –*
71 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
72 *houris, cloistered in cool pavilions –*
73 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
74 *untouched before them by any man or jinn –*
75 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
76 *reclining upon green cushions and lovely druggets –*
77 *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
78 *Blessed be the Name of thy Lord, majestic, splendid.*

While the psalm has been studied extensively,[42] *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is still perceived in Western scholarship as difficult to understand, its literary shape being considered highly controversial. In particular, since Nöldeke's groundbreaking work in 1860, *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*'s addressing of two groups ('you and you', expressed by the dual form) in the refrain has been considered no more than an eccentricity of Qur'anic speech, that, in this case, only occurs to maintain the rhyme.[43] Subsequent scholars have not been able to free themselves of this verdict, as the judgements of Horovitz, Paret and Friedrun Müller show.[44] Wansbrough also employs this explanation for the final part of the sura in order to support his postulate that the sura was a secondary composition from diverse traditions, only put together by later redactors.[45] Though the style of the Qur'an is generally viewed pejoratively in current Western scholarship, this particular sura seems to be a specific target. In view of the absence of literary studies on the sura,[46] we will proceed with a

microstructural analysis that will look at the text's form and structure before attempting a comparison with Psalms 136.

Analysis of Sūrat al-Raḥmān

Sūrat al-Raḥmān differs from earlier Qur'anic texts in more than one regard. The sura displays a continuous refrain clad in a rhetorical question (from Q. 55:13 onwards) addressed to men and jinn,[47] who, together, form a mythical ensemble unrelated to any particular time or space. Also, its narrative is not bound up with earthly concerns, but remains in the mythical realm, presenting possible rebels among men and jinn who might try to defy the order of creation, but who remain constrained by their place in the cosmos. Part I (Q. 55:1–13) presents a summary of the primordial act of creation. This is continued in part II (Q. 55:14–36), which also introduces the two groups of dissenters; this section starts to regularly employ the refrain that was introduced shortly before in Q. 55:13. Though part III (Q. 55:37–78) alludes, in passing, to the historical Meccan opponents (Q. 55:43), it generally focuses on the mythical ensemble of men and jinn, both of whom are summoned – as is recorded in other eschatological suras for humans exclusively – to the final judgement. Whereas the place reserved for the condemned is described only in passing, the beatific space destined for the blessed, however, is depicted extensively, supported by a unique array of stylistic devices. In this final part, the description of two gardens of paradise obviously forms the climax of the sura. Several questions arise: What is the function of the refrain? Why is such a mythical scenario presented? What about the particularly strong presence in the text of the dual forms and the duality of phenomena? The sura has been analysed by both the present author and by Muhammad Abdel Haleem in detail;[48] both interpretations will be reconsidered here.

The prelude (Q. 55:1–4), made up of short hymnal verses, announces the two main topics of the sura: creation (*khalq*, Q. 55:3) and the divine instruction of the word of God (*qur'ān*, Q. 55:2) which has been made accessible to mankind through clear (*bayān*, Q. 55:4) speech, or clear understanding. The first verse, through the explicit mention of the decisive divine name *al-raḥmān* (the Merciful), sets the tone for the entire sura in both semantic and phonetic terms, as Abdel Haleem rightly stresses. The structure of the composition is tripartite, as we have already noted.[49] The first two hymns,[50] excluding Q. 55:31–6, and the eschatological part, excluding Q. 55:37–45, are concerned with the entelechy of creation in paradise. However, while the first theme, creation, is dealt with explicitly throughout the text, the second theme, clear speech, is implicit and unfolds exclusively through the sura's rhetoric.

The sura, which is particularly poetic, exemplifies a central Qur'anic theologoumenon: that the symmetry of the divine order of creation is reflected

in the Qur'an not only at the semantic level but the linguistic (i.e. the grammatical and phonetic) level as well. Symmetry is not only discernible in the content of the divine speech, it is equally apparent in the text's structure; this appearance is made possible by a trait unique to Arabic morphology – the dual form. The sura's prolific use of the dual form, which was a prominent feature of pre-Islamic poetic compositions, implies a poetic claim that was unfamiliar in most Jewish and Christian scriptural texts. The poetic character of the Qur'an has often been dismissed by critical scholars as merely ornamental, and as an obstacle that prevents the reader from immediately grasping the message. In the case of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, the poetic form is clearly part of the message itself. Symmetry in this text is as characteristic of the signified as it is of the sign. In view of the fact that the recitation – *qur'ān* – is considered to be the most sublime speech act, *bayān* can be understood as the quality of clarity residing in the Qur'anic language itself. Thus, two phenomena – the harmonious order of beings (*kosmos*) and the distinctness and clarity of speech (logos) – which have been inherent in the world since the act of creation, permeate the entire sura.

Though Western scholarship has tended to criticise the dual form in the Qur'an, it is clear from these observations that the text's sophisticated linguistic shape is significant and, indeed, functional. The dismissive assessment that the dual forms merely result from the rhythmic constrains is equally unfounded from a formal point of view since the refrain starts immediately before the first mention of the creation of the two groups – man and jinn – being a reference to them.[51] The pairing of man and jinn (Q. 55:14–15) recurs in the sura five more times: in the cautionary speech (Q. 55:31, Q. 55:33), in the section on the cosmic dissolution (Q. 55:39), and twice in both of the descriptions of the gardens (Q. 55:56 and Q. 55:74). Man and jinn, who are addressed continuously in the refrain, are then equally present in the text itself. Though the presence of jinn in the context of the sura may come as a surprise to modern readers, they should be regarded as part of the ancient Arab cosmos;[52] in the sura they constitute the counterpart to men in a world that is perceived by the transmitter and his community as being full of contradictions yet harmoniously balanced.

The problem of the sura's social function, its Sitz im Leben

By virtue of the refrain that pervades the entire text, the sura appears to bear a liturgical function. The sura's scenario – so strikingly remote from social reality and replete with mythical references of a cosmic, primordial and eschatological nature – becomes more familiar once it is identified as an echo of Psalms 136,[53] which similarly stands out as a unique mythical tableau in its

own scriptural corpus. The sura is obviously a text-referential composition; but what about its *Sitz im Leben*?

The text itself does not yield any answers to this question, nor are there any parallels in the Qur'an that would facilitate a determination of its social or exact liturgical purpose, as there is no text structurally comparable to *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*. The fact that a refrain is found only in one other sura, *Sūrat al-Mursalāt* (Q. 77), where it bears a different function,[54] suggests that the refrain in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is a reference to a text from outside of the nascent Qur'anic community. At this point, it may be helpful to make use of the theory developed by Michael Riffaterre, who established the category of 'ungrammaticality' and, more specifically, that of the 'dual sign',[55] a linguistic sign that by virtue of its anomaly within its context points to another text in which the striking phenomenon is normal. The significance of that other text here exceeds that of a usual literary subtext, since it is only through the reference to that text that the complete decoding of the text under investigation is possible. For *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, this other text is Psalms 136. This text, which has been celebrated since Talmudic times as 'the great Hallel'[56] – in contrast to 'the simple Hallel' (Psalms 115–18)[57] – is an important part of Jewish worship and plays an equally important role in Christianity as a prayer. Sections of the psalm are also used in the Jewish prayer at mealtimes as well as in its Christian counterpart. Its liturgical import and character would have been familiar to the burgeoning Qur'anic community, and this context may be assumed to have been the background for the genesis of this sura.

What is striking is that *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, although directed to a plurality of addressees in a few verses (Q. 55:8–9 and Q. 55:31 and 35), seems as a whole not to be addressed by the transmitter to 'real', historical listeners. Was this text, which was not designed to be recited (or at least not directly addressed) *to* the community, perhaps intended as a litany to be recited *by* them?[58] The function of the text would thus suit the context of its genesis, that is, the period when the early community developed into a prayer faction and a central cultic text, the communal prayer – the *Fātiḥa*, emerged.[59]

Sūrat al-Raḥmān *and Psalms 136 compared*

There are three striking similarities between the two texts: the antiphonal structure, the frequency of the refrain, and the alternating harmonious and tense relationship between the narrative account and the refrain.

Psalms 136

1 *O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*
2 *O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever.*

3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.
4 To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.
5 To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.
6 To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.
7 To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever:
8 The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever:
9 The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.
10 To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever:
11 And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever:
12 With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever.
13 To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever:
14 And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever:
15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.
16 To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.
17 To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:
18 And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:
19 Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever:
20 And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever:
21 And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever:
22 Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever.
23 Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever:
24 And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever.
25 Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever.
26 O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.

The beginning of the psalm is semantically similar to the beginning of the sura; it starts with an invitation to praise God (Psalms 136:1–3). The psalm thus displays the refrain 'for his mercy endureth for ever' from the very beginning. It continues with a reminiscence of the creation of the heavens

own scriptural corpus. The sura is obviously a text-referential composition; but what about its *Sitz im Leben*?

The text itself does not yield any answers to this question, nor are there any parallels in the Qur'an that would facilitate a determination of its social or exact liturgical purpose, as there is no text structurally comparable to *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*. The fact that a refrain is found only in one other sura, *Sūrat al-Mursalāt* (Q. 77), where it bears a different function,[54] suggests that the refrain in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is a reference to a text from outside of the nascent Qur'anic community. At this point, it may be helpful to make use of the theory developed by Michael Riffaterre, who established the category of 'ungrammaticality' and, more specifically, that of the 'dual sign',[55] a linguistic sign that by virtue of its anomaly within its context points to another text in which the striking phenomenon is normal. The significance of that other text here exceeds that of a usual literary subtext, since it is only through the reference to that text that the complete decoding of the text under investigation is possible. For *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, this other text is Psalms 136. This text, which has been celebrated since Talmudic times as 'the great Hallel'[56] – in contrast to 'the simple Hallel' (Psalms 115–18)[57] – is an important part of Jewish worship and plays an equally important role in Christianity as a prayer. Sections of the psalm are also used in the Jewish prayer at mealtimes as well as in its Christian counterpart. Its liturgical import and character would have been familiar to the burgeoning Qur'anic community, and this context may be assumed to have been the background for the genesis of this sura.

What is striking is that *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, although directed to a plurality of addressees in a few verses (Q. 55:8–9 and Q. 55:31 and 35), seems as a whole not to be addressed by the transmitter to 'real', historical listeners. Was this text, which was not designed to be recited (or at least not directly addressed) *to* the community, perhaps intended as a litany to be recited *by* them?[58] The function of the text would thus suit the context of its genesis, that is, the period when the early community developed into a prayer faction and a central cultic text, the communal prayer – the *Fātiḥa*, emerged.[59]

Sūrat al-Raḥmān *and Psalms 136 compared*

There are three striking similarities between the two texts: the antiphonal structure, the frequency of the refrain, and the alternating harmonious and tense relationship between the narrative account and the refrain.

Psalms 136

1 O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.
2 O give thanks unto the God of gods: for his mercy endureth for ever.

3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords: for his mercy endureth for ever.
4 To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.
5 To him that by wisdom made the heavens: for his mercy endureth for ever.
6 To him that stretched out the earth above the waters: for his mercy endureth for ever.
7 To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever:
8 The sun to rule by day: for his mercy endureth for ever:
9 The moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever.
10 To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever:
11 And brought out Israel from among them: for his mercy endureth for ever:
12 With a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm: for his mercy endureth for ever.
13 To him which divided the Red sea into parts: for his mercy endureth for ever:
14 And made Israel to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy endureth for ever:
15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.
16 To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever.
17 To him which smote great kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:
18 And slew famous kings: for his mercy endureth for ever:
19 Sihon king of the Amorites: for his mercy endureth for ever:
20 And Og the king of Bashan: for his mercy endureth for ever:
21 And gave their land for an heritage: for his mercy endureth for ever:
22 Even an heritage unto Israel his servant: for his mercy endureth for ever.
23 Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever:
24 And hath redeemed us from our enemies: for his mercy endureth for ever.
25 Who giveth food to all flesh: for his mercy endureth for ever.
26 O give thanks unto the God of heaven: for his mercy endureth for ever.

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(Psalms 136:5), which corresponds to Q. 55:7 where the idea of the divine understanding (*tebhūnāh*, Hebrew word derived from the same stem as the Arabic *bayān*), seems to have been replaced by the symbol of reason, the balance.[60] Equally, Psalms 136:6, which talks about the creation of the earth, has its Qur'anic correlate in Q. 55:10. Other matching verses include Psalms 136:7–8 and Q. 55:5; Psalms 136:9 and Q. 55:6. At this point, however, the Qur'anic argument shifts: it is not the moon and the stars that are combined but the stars and the trees; moreover, the stars bow down in adoration of God rather than ruling at night as they do in the psalm. In the Qur'an, created phenomena are not autonomous but the subjects of God.

From Psalms 136:9 onwards, the divergences between the two texts increase. The psalm's refrain 'for his mercy endureth for ever', like the Qur'an's refrain *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*, reflects the evident truth of the divine mercy; however, it is clearly different from the Qur'anic refrain. It is not mythical in tone and does not conjure up a duality of creatures holding an ambivalent stance to God's omnipotence, but recalls His unambiguous and infinite charity. What is most striking, though, is that the focus shifts in Psalms 136:10 and turns to the divine acts in history: 'To him that smote Egypt in their firstborn: for his mercy endureth for ever'. The verse is followed by further references to history, presented under the twofold aspect of the salvation of Israel and the vengeance wrought by God upon the enemies of Israel (Psalms 136:10–22). Although the focus of the psalm is different from that of the sura – the one recounting events of history, the other describing events pertinent to the mythical realm, such as the jinn's attempts to rebel against the cosmic order – this part of the psalm exhibits the same general problematic present in Q. 55:31–5. The coexistence of God's acts of annihilation in the narrative account with His enduring charity promised in the refrain creates tension in this part of psalm in much the same way that tension is created in the sura, when the cautionary addresses to men and jinn are interwoven with a refrain that, until then, carried a positive connotation. The tension between the narrative and the refrain is felt even more strongly in Q. 55:37–45, where the positively connoted bounties (*ālā'*) of the refrain appear alongside acts of annihilation in the narrative.

The similarity between the two sections, Q. 55:31–45 and Psalms 136:10–20, is, however, limited to this intrinsic tension between God's acts of charity detailed in the refrain and the annihilation expressed in the narration. These sections, though both introducing ambivalence, do not really match each other. Whereas the psalm's section on history, Psalms 136:10–20, is the core part of Psalms 136, Q. 55:31–5 is no more than a prelude to the real climax of the sura, which is the description of paradise. The psalm's particular mode of

remembering history has no correlate in the early Qur'anic texts, where the reflection on history is usually tinged with perplexity at the annihilation of a past society. The position that history holds in the psalm is, in the Qur'an, the position occupied by God's power to resurrect the dead and to complete his creation in paradise. The history part of the psalm is thus replaced by an eschatological part in the sura. Only in their endings, from Q. 55:46 onwards and Psalms 136:25, do the two texts converge again with the idea of the divine provision of sustenance. Both the psalm and the sura also conclude with the praise of God (Psalms 136:26 and Q. 55:78).

Two Different Manifestations of the Divine: History versus Eschatology

Two texts dealing with the power of the Divine and His care for the created beings have been juxtaposed above. Whereas the psalm seeks proof of the divine presence in the drama of historical acts of salvation and divine bestowals, in the Qur'an it is the order of creation – which encompasses everything, the human and extra-human – that furnishes proof of the divine presence and whose linguistic representation is itself proof of this order.[61] Historical drama is thus replaced with the linguistic mimesis of the balanced order of creation, since the creatures evoked and addressed in the sura are hidden from the real world and projected into a timeless, mythic world. In the Qur'an concrete persons are not named, in contrast to the psalm which refers to historical persons and events, each of which evoke narrative memories. In the Qur'an, neither the individual listeners nor the transmitter appears within the depicted scenes. This absence of listeners and of 'real' dramatis personae creates a somewhat static quality in the presentation. Like the virtual rebels and the collective transgressors in the section on Judgement Day who remain without individuality, so too do the maidens and houris (Q. 55:56–8, Q. 55:70–5).[62]

This Qur'anic re-reading of a well-known liturgical text intentionally goes far beyond the mere appropriation of ideas and images. It constitutes an attempt to respond to – indeed, to eclipse – a powerful older text that was particularly cherished in both the Jewish and the Christian traditions. Psalms 136 was not simply perceived as a part of the monotheistic legacy to be immediately integrated into the newly emerging canon of the Qur'anic community. On the contrary, it proved provoking and thus necessitated a new reading in Qur'anic terms. This re-reading is in no way a loose paraphrase of the psalm like *Sūrat al-Naba'* was of the sequence of verses from Psalms 104; rather, it marks a shift in thematic (and implicitly in theological) scope – from history to eschatology – which, in the emerging Qur'anic community, was a

most significant discourse, equivalent to the discourse of history in Jewish contexts.

The Arab Dimension of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*

Reflecting on *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*'s prioritising of eschatological matters over historical ones, one should not, however, rashly dismiss the central image of paradise as having nothing to do with the society or the politics of the time. The political, or at least the historical, dimension implicit in the descriptions of paradise clearly transpires once the sura is contextualised with its non-Biblical literary precursor – ancient Arabic poetry, the medium of the pre-Islamic master-narrative of the hero's confrontation with a world devoid of meaning. Evidence that *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* is also a response to poetry is manifest in the description of the two gardens of paradise.[63] This is clear from its traits shared with poetry that are in striking contrast to the anticipated integrity of the primordial space: the Qur'anic paradise displays traces of civilisation, such as tents (Q. 55:72), the presence of luxurious textiles like carpets and cushions (Q. 55:54, Q. 55:76), and the presence of beautiful young women who behave according to the dictates of social decorum (Q. 55:56, Q. 55:70). Horovitz assumed that the Qur'anic paradise scenarios reflected banquet scenes from ancient Arabic poetry.[64] Looking closely at the descriptions one does not, however, find a banquet but a static tableau portraying groups of men and women in a lush natural environment furnished with aesthetically refined artefacts. This seems to be less a reference to a particular episode of ancient poetry than a response to the more general outlook expressed in the ancient Arabic *qaṣīda*. It is an inversion of the image presented in the *qaṣīda*'s elegiac-philosophical *nasīb* that depicts nature as a wasteland, a landscape of ruins, which has been stripped of civilisation and is inaccessible to the poet who seeks to communicate with it. Phrases like, 'Extinguished are the abodes' (*'afati'l-diyāru*) or similar wordings form the stereotypical beginning of a large number of these poems, which conjure up empty spaces and the loss of communication. Often, the descriptions of the ruins in these poems culminate in the image of an inscription on the body, since the traces of the abodes resemble the lines of a tattoo engraved on a wrist, for instance. Or, even more revealing, the descriptions culminate in the evocation of writings on a rock, curiously designated *waḥy*,[65] a term that later covers 'inspiration' but seems more generally to mean a non-verbal message which forces itself on the beholder without, however, disclosing its meaning. There is, then, a meaningful message immanent in the writing and, thus, too in the empty space but it is hidden from the beholder. The 'extinguished

abodes' and the lost beloved ones represent negations to the poet-hero: irreversible time, irretrievable meaning and unrecoverable emotional fulfilment. The poet perceives the place as desolate since a past civilisation has become overrun by nature.

In pre-Islamic poetry, nature defies the poet by not responding to his ever-repeated question about the whereabouts of the erstwhile pulsating society, the reliable social structures, the aesthetic equipment of the living space with its promise of erotic pleasure. Nature is no more than a mute mirror reflecting the bleak truth of his mortality. All culture and all other human achievements will fall prey to time or be obscured by nature, for nature alone is capable of cyclically renewing itself. In the words of the ancient Arabic poet Labīd: 'We waste away but the rising stars do not, mountains remain and castles' (*Balīnā wa-lā tablā'l-nujūmu'l-ṭawāli'u, wa tabqā'l-jibālu ba'danā wa'l-maṣāni'u*).[66] Time does not affect nature, which is eternal (*khālid*) and recurs. Man, as opposed to that, is consumed by time, which is personified as *dahr* (fate).

It is this perception that nature and fate will inevitably overwhelm mankind and civilisation that the Qur'an seeks to refute. In *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* God Himself takes over the role of fate and reshapes the time of man, which now ranges from the primordial creation of the world (Q. 55.3) to the end of the world on Judgement Day (Q. 55:37–42); it even starts before creation, with the proclamation of the word of God (Q. 55:2) and extends into the hereafter, into paradise (Q. 55:46–78). The Qur'anic description of paradise not only provides a reversal of the erstwhile image of nature as bleak and threatening into one which holds the promise of sustenance and renewal, it retrieves the lost civilisation and its cultural paraphernalia – the cushions and carpets, the beautiful young women and the material enjoyments of life. *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*'s re-reading of Psalms 136 thus reinstalls reflections on history by rewriting ancient Arabic poetry. The Biblical conception of God's eternally lasting mercy connects with the Arab anticipation that God will respond to the aporia of man by recovering that which had been lost, thereby restoring his future.

The sura's change in focus from history to eschatology is accompanied by the meta-discourse that was mentioned earlier: the intelligibility of the signs, *āyāt*, of the cosmos through the clarity of God's language. A comparable example of self-referentiality is alien to the psalm. The Qur'an, however, being a document of the exegetically oriented debate culture of Late Antiquity, pursues a hermeneutical scheme. It endeavours to do nothing less than decipher the undecipherable, to decode the message of the enigmatic writing (*waḥy*) that had haunted the ancient poet. The enigma, *waḥy*, reappears in the Qur'an to introduce hermeneutics par excellence – the revelation. With this new paradigm, the Qur'an offers its listeners a promise: not of divine loyalty exemplified by

divine interventions in salvation history but of God's liberation of man from his cultural and ontological bereavement – his being cut-off from a meaningful history – and his being a prisoner to the irreversible elapsing of time.

NOTES

1 See the discussion of the concept of *muruwwa* in Montgomery, 'Dichotomy'; see also chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
2 Jane Idleman Smith, 'Eschatology', *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 44–54.
3 Maher Jarrar, 'The Martyrdom of Passionate Lovers: Holy War as a Sacred Wedding', in Angelika Neuwirth *et al.*, eds. *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach* (Beirut, 1999), pp. 87–108.
4 Horovitz deserves to be mentioned as an exception; see Josef Horovitz, 'Das Koranische Paradies', *Scripta Universitatis atque Bibliothecae Hierosolymitana* 1, no. 6 (1923), pp. 1–16; repr. in Rudi Paret, ed., *Der Koran* (Darmstadt, 1975), pp. 53–73.
5 Leah Kinberg, 'Paradise', *EQ*, vol. IV, pp. 12–20.
6 Geiger, *Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*; see also chapter 1, *'Neither of the East nor of the West'*.
7 Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 67–73.
8 Saleh, 'Etymological Fallacy'.
9 Patricia Crone, 'How Did the Quranic Pagans Make a Living?' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68 (2005), pp. 387–99; eadem, 'The Quranic *Mushrikūn* and the Resurrection (Part I)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75 (2012), pp. 445–72; (Part II), 76 (2013), pp. 1–20.
10 Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*.
11 Angelika Neuwirth, 'Symmetrie und Paarbildung in der koranischen Eschatologie: Philologisch–stilistisches zu Surat ar–Rahman', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 50 (1984), pp. 447–80; eadem, 'Qur'ānic Readings of the Psalms', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 733–78.
12 See Marx, 'Koranforschungsprojekt'.
13 Ṣoubhi el-Ṣaleḥ, *La Vie future selon le Coran* (Paris, 1971); Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany, NY, 1981); Asma Afsaruddin, 'Garden', *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 282–7; Aziz al-Azmeh, 'Rhetoric for the Senses: A Consideration of Muslim Paradise Narratives', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 26 (1995), pp. 215–31.
14 See, e.g., *St Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise*, tr. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY, 1990). See also Brock's references to Jewish texts, such as the Palestinian Targum on Genesis 3:24: 'He drove out Adam . . . He created the Law and established the Garden of Eden for the righteous, so that they might eat from it and enjoy its fruits, seeing that they had kept the commandments of the Law in this world.'
15 It is, however, hard to ignore that the so-called *hekhalot* literature, which focuses on the ascension narratives, is primarily interested in the heavenly representations of the temple, not in a garden scenery; see Peter Schäfer, *Die Ursprünge der jüdischen Mystik* (Berlin, 2011). Translated into English as *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen, 2009); Simone Rosenkranz Verhelst, 'Zwischen Himmel und Heiligtum: Paradiesvorstellungen im Judentum und Christentum', in Claudia Benthien and Manuela Gerlof, eds., *Paradies: Topografien der Sehnsucht* (Cologne, 2010), pp. 31–48.
16 Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 17a.
17 Wild, 'Lost in Philology?'
18 *Q. 17:55: and We gave to David Psalms (wa ataynā Dā'ūda zabūrā).* In ancient Arabic poetry, the related term *zubur* often simply denotes writing, usually an inscription on a rock.

Occasionally it is mentioned in the context of monastic recitation, where recitation of the psalms may be presupposed. Yet, the identification of the psalms with *zabūr* may go back to the Qur'an. For earlier discussions of the etymology, see Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda, 1938), pp. 148–9.
19 Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, p. 348. Psalm 37:9: 'For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth'; Psalm 37:11: 'But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace'; Psalm 37:29: 'The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever'.
20 Griffith, 'Christians and Christianity'.
21 Schippers, 'Psalms'.
22 Neuwirth, 'Structure and the Emergence of Community'; Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Berlin, 1895), p. 488.
23 Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*. An attempt to synchronise the development of both textual and ritual practice is presented in chapter 5, 'Recitation'.
24 Baumstark, 'Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus'.
25 See Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'ān: Islam in Its Scripture* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 146–62 and William A. Graham, '"The Winds to Herald His Mercy" and Other "Signs for Those of Certain Faith": Nature as Token of God's Sovereignty and Grace in the Qur'an', in Sang Hyun Lee, Wayne Proudfoot and Albert Blackwell, eds., *Faithful Imagining* (Atlanta, GA, 1995), pp. 19–38.
26 See Cragg, *Event of the Qur'ān*, pp. 95–109.
27 The term psalmist here is used to denote all the poets involved in composing the psalms without distinguishing between them.
28 See Cragg, *Event of the Qur'ān*, pp. 163–81.
29 Neuwirth, 'Einige Bemerkungen'; Schippers, 'Psalms'.
30 See Georges Tamer, *Zeit und Gott: Hellenistische Zeitvorstellungen in der altarabischen Dichtung und im Koran* (Berlin, 2008).
31 Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 192–7; Cragg, *Event of the Qur'ān*, pp. 146–62; Graham, 'Winds to Herald His Mercy'.
32 Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korân* (Leipzig, 1886); English tr., *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran* (London, 1902); Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*; Neuwirth, *Studien*.
33 Speyer (*Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 497–8) identifies thirteen Qur'anic references that relate to Psalm 104, without considering *Sūrat al-Naba'*, however.
34 In Judaism it is recited at the end of the morning service on Rōsh Ḥōdesh, the first day of the new month; see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, tr. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia, PA, 1993), p. 106. However, Elbogen (ibid, p. 10) stresses that the oldest source of his information goes back no earlier than 1300. Today, it is further recited after the Shabbat afternoon services from the beginning of the reading cycle in autumn (Pārāshat Be-Rēshīt), just after Shemīnī 'Aṣeret/Simḥat Tōrā', until Shabbat ha-Gādōl, just before Passover (Information kindly provided by Tobie Strauss, Hebrew University of Jerusalem). In Christianity, parts of the Psalm serve as a prayer after meals. In ecclesiastical prayer it is recited on Tuesday mornings; see Julius Y. Çiçek, *Kthobo dkandilo d'al tayobe* (Glane/Losser, Bar-Hebraeus, 1983), p. 41.
35 On the composition of *Sūrat al-Naba'*, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, p. 217 and eadem, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp 452–78.
36 See Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen: Handkommentar zum Alten Testament* (Göttingen, 1968), p. 448.
37 Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York, 1953), p. 195.
38 See Franz Rosenthal, 'History and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. II, p. 428–42; Neuwirth, 'Qur'an and History'.

39 The topic is embedded in the Qur'anic legends of retribution (*Straflegenden*) which are discussed by Horovitz in *Koranische Untersuchungen*.

40 The topography of the annihilated communities (*umam khāliya*) is left undetermined in the early Qur'anic communications. It is explicitly referred to as their *diyār* only in later suras.

41 The reference is to the poetical topos of '*ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere?*' ('where have those gone who were living before us?'), to which we will return later.

42 Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* pp. 445–56; see also Woodrow Michael Kroll, *Psalms: The Poetry of Palestine* (Lanham, MD, 1987), pp. 402–4; Mitchell Dahood, *The Anchor Bible. Psalms III 101–150: Introduction, Translation, and Notes with an Appendix. The Grammar of the Psalter* (New York, 1979), pp. 264–7; Pierre Auffret, 'Note sur la structure littéraire du Psaume CXXXVI', *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (1977), pp. 1–12; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament*, vol. XV, *Psalmen* (Neukirchen, 1978), pp. 1076–80; Helmut Lamparter, *Das Buch der Psalmen: Übersetzt und ausgelegt* (Stuttgart, 1958–1959), pp. 529–31.

43 Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, p. 30. This claim of the sura's eccentricity was accepted and perpetuated by Friedrich Schwally in his new edition of Nöldeke's publication; see Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, p. 40. Nöldeke also repeated his verdict in *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strasbourg, 1910), p. 9.

44 Horovitz, 'Das Koranische Paradies', p. 55; Rudi Paret (*Der Koran: Übersetzung* [Stuttgart, 1980], p. 177) translates the refrain using a plural form, '*ihr*', instead of the dual form, '*ihr beide*'. In his commentary, (Paret, *Kommentar*, p. 466), no further explanation is found except for a short note on Q. 55:13 claiming that the dual form was employed to support the rhyme; Müller also agrees with this apodictic judgement; see Friedrun Müller, *Untersuchungen zur Reimprosa im Koran* (Bonn, 1969), p. 132. See also the principal criticism of Müller's approach by John Wansbrough, Review of *Untersuchungen zur Reimprosa im Koran*, by Friedrun Müller, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33 (1970), pp. 389–91.

45 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 25: 'the dual form *jannatān* was demanded by the scheme obtaining there for verse juncture, but in fact represented the singular *janna*'.

46 My analysis of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* in 'Symmetrie' does not focus on the development of the argument in the sura.

47 See Angelika Neuwirth, 'Qur'ānic Literary Structure Revisited: *Sūrat ar-Raḥmān* between Mythic Account and Decodation of Myth', in Stefan Leder, ed., *Story-telling in the Framework of Non-fictional Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1998), pp. 388–420.

48 See Muhammad A.S. Abdel Haleem, 'Context and Internal Relationships: Keys to Quranic Exegesis. A Study of *Sūrat al-Raḥman* (Qur'ān Chapter 55)', in Hawting and Shareef, *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, pp. 71–98. His observations often intersect with mine; see, e.g., Neuwirth, 'Symmetrie'. References to Abdel Haleem will therefore be limited to those observations that I had not discussed before.

49 Cf. Abdel Haleem, 'Context and Internal Relationships', p. 75. He divides the sura in a different way: Q. 55:1–30, 31–45 and 46–78.

50 For the classification of Qur'anic texts according to genre, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 187–203.

51 Abdel Haleem's critique of Richard Bell's hypothesis that the refrain was a later insertion is fully justified; see Abdel Haleem, 'Context and Internal Relationships', p. 80.

52 Jacqueline Chabbi, 'Jinn', *EQ*, vol. IV, pp. 43–50.

53 Besides Psalm 136, Psalm 104 is occasionally evoked. This intertextuality between *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* and Psalm 104, however, does not serve a particular theological purpose; see Neuwirth, 'Qur'ānic Readings of the Psalms'.

54 The refrain occurs ten times in *Sūrat al-Mursalāt*. Wansbrough (*Quranic Studies*, p. 226) has alerted us to the unique function of the refrain in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*: 'I should like here to

insist upon the term litany rather than refrain. The role of the latter in the Qur'an and elsewhere is that of a concluding formula, which does not adequately describe the employment of the device in this passage.' Cf. Abdel Haleem, 'Context and Internal Relationships', p. 80.

55 Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (London, 1980), p. 92: 'the dual sign works like a pun . . . It is first apprehended as a mere ungrammaticality, until the discovery is made that there is another text in which the word is grammatical; the moment the other text is identified, the dual sign becomes significant purely because of its shape, which alone alludes to that other code.'

56 Babylonian Talmud, Pesaḥim 118.

57 An earlier attempt at a comparison between the Hallel and *Surat al-Raḥmān* was presented in Neuwirth, 'Qur'ānic Literary Structure Revisited'.

58 'Litany' in this context should not be understood in its strict sense as a penitential prayer involving a further performer (or group of performers) who articulates the refrain.

59 See chapter 7, 'Referentiality'.

60 Nöldeke (*Geschichte des Qorans*, pp. 106–7) considers Q. 55:8–9, which addressed historical listeners and refers to Q. 83:1–3, to be a verse group added later. This is, however, not convincing, since throughout the sura there is substantial intertextuality with the psalm.

61 Angelika Neuwirth, 'Form and Structure of the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 245–66; eadem, 'Rhetoric and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. IV, pp. 464–5.

62 al-Azmeh, 'Rhetoric'.

63 The fact that a pair of paradises is presented, and that a pair of trees and fountains appears, can be explained by the principle of symmetry that underlies the text as a whole.

64 Horovitz, 'Das Koranische Paradies'.

65 For a survey of poetical references to *waḥy* in this sense, see James E. Montgomery, 'The Deserted Encampment in Ancient Arabic Poetry: A Nexus of Topical Comparisons', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 40, no. 2 (1995), pp. 283–316. The issue of poetic versus Qur'anic *waḥy* is discussed in detail in Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

66 This verse is discussed by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), p. 19.

4

Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Early Meccan Suras*

Introduction

IT IS a truism that the introductory sections of literary compositions usually hold a significance that goes far beyond their informational value. Within Arabic literature, this fact has long been established in regard to the most prominent poetical genre, the *qaṣīda*, whose fairly stereotypical introductory section (*nasīb*) has been closely studied by several scholars.[1] In particular, a study by Andras Hamori, which is based on a psychological approach, has shown to what extent this introductory section constitutes the clue to an adequate understanding of the interior structure of the entire composition, since it represents, more than any other part of the *qaṣīda*, a poetical expression of both the psychic mood of the ancient Arabian poet as well as of his audience, and their spatial and temporal self-localisations.[2] More recent scholarship has even claimed that the *nasīb* bears a philosophical dimension,[3] and thus entails the key to understanding the entire genre of the *qaṣīda*.

However, the particular importance of the introductory sections of the Qur'anic suras in relation to the entire composition has never been discussed systematically.[4] This is not to say that the introductory sections have not aroused any attention at all. On the contrary, observations concerning the beginning of the suras have led to a momentous hypothesis about the nature of Muhammad's prophethood that has been widely taken for granted in subsequent scholarship: in view of the fact that the early suras betray a striking similarity to the utterances of the pre-Islamic *kuhhān* (soothsayers), transmitted in early Islamic literature, scholars have claimed that these suras are the most reliable evidence of *kuhhān* speech itself,[5] thus indicating that Muhammad drew upon the *kāhin* tradition as he communicated his message

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Makkan *Sūras*', in Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds., *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (Abingdon, Routledge, 1993), pp. 3–36. Reprinted by kind permission of the publisher.

in the Meccan period.[6] However, the specimens of *kuhhān* sayings that have come down to us are not always assuredly genuine and may have been fashioned upon the suras rather than the other way around. Furthermore, the literary form of these sparse materials has never been studied systematically. Thus, theories about their relation to Qur'anic speech still lack a sound foundation.[7] The present chapter is intended *inter alia* to be a preliminary contribution to the resolution of the question of the relationship between *kāhīn* expression and the early suras. Its main purpose is, however, to explore the meaning as well as the function of the introductory oaths of a series of early Meccan suras.[8] In Western scholarship, these oaths are usually treated as the most evident examples of *kāhin* influence on Qur'anic speech, and are therefore considered to be obscure and enigmatic.[9]

The Introductory Oath Clusters

General observations concerning the type of oath

The oath – in its original legal context – is no more than the verbal pronouncement within a procedure composed of both speech and particular symbolic acts.[10] Oaths bearing traces of legally binding commitments are found sporadically in the Qur'an, mostly appearing as solemn pronouncements evoking God to bear witness to the truth of a statement.[11] In this particular chapter, however, the oath clusters under scrutiny serve exclusively as a literary device and are devoid of any legal connotation.[12] Several formal characteristics of the passages in question, the most striking being the multiplicity of the formulae, suggest such an understanding. A further characteristic is the oaths' standard formula of *wa-X* ('by X'), or *lā uqsimu bi-X* ('verily, I swear by X'), followed by a statement, usually worded *inna-X la-Y* ('verily X is Y'), which does not suggest any legally binding commitment of the speaker. Still, one may ask what these literary oaths have in common with legal oaths. Both kinds of oaths owe their persuasiveness to the reference to a distinct range of ideas. The speaker who swears an oath usually does not refer to phenomena from the everyday world surrounding him, nor from the immediate context of his discourse, but to phenomena of a different, in most cases hierarchically superior, realm. He thus creates a clear bipartite structure made up of an oath formula, which is semantically distinct from the context, and an emphatic statement, which is an integral part of the discourse itself.

In this chapter we will survey all the suras which start with oath clusters. Several Muslim Qur'an commentaries have occasionally been consulted and referred to in cases where particular passages present hermeneutical difficulties

or have provoked controversial interpretation. Mainly, however, independent interpretations have been attempted, based on the consideration of structural continuity in Qur'anic speech.[13] With one exception – *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* – these suras belong to the first Meccan period according to Nöldeke's chronology.[14] The introductory oath clusters found in these suras may be classified as follows:

1. Oath clusters of the type *wa'l-fāʿilāt: Sūrat al-ʿĀdiyāt* (Q. 100), *Sūrat al-Nāziʿāt* (Q. 79), *Sūrat al-Mursalāt* (Q. 77), *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt* (Q. 51), *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* (Q. 37).
2. Oath clusters referring to sacred localities: *Sūrat al-Tīn* (Q. 95), *Sūrat al-Balad* (Q. 90), *Sūrat al-Ṭūr* (Q. 52).
3. Oath clusters referring to the phases of the day and night, and to cosmic phenomena: *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā* (Q. 93), *Sūrat al-Layl* (Q. 92), *Sūrat al-Shams* (Q. 91), *Sūrat al-Fajr* (Q. 89), *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* (Q. 86), *Sūrat al-Burūj* (Q. 85). Oath clusters of this particular type that only appear in a few instances, such as in the interior sections of early Meccan suras, but do not have a prominent introductory function, will also be considered.

All the Qur'anic passages that will be discussed are presented in an appendix at the end of this chapter.

Oath clusters of the type *wa'l-fāʿilāt*

We shall first turn to the oaths that have been considered the most intricate, both by traditional Islamic exegetes and by Western scholars. They are oaths that do not explicitly name the objects they refer to but only allude to their movement (with the exception of one of the later suras, *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*). They occupy an exceptional position in the Qur'an insofar as they display a metaphorical language distinct from that of the rest of the corpus. However, it is not because of their undeniable lexical and grammatical ambiguities that they are known for being particularly enigmatic.[15] Rather, this is due to a more fundamental difficulty: their pronouncedly profane imagery, which does not correlate with the general purport of the suras as documents of religious discourse.

1. *Sūrat al-ʿĀdiyāt*[16]

Q. 100 (oath, Q. 100:1–5; emphatic statement, Q. 100:6–8; eschatological threat, Q. 100:9–11)

1 *By the panting runners,*
2 *Striking fire in sparks,* (*fa-*)

3 *Storming forward in the morning,* (*fa-*)
4 *Their track a dust-cloud,* (*fa-*)
5 [*That finally appear in the centre of a crowd,*][17] (*fa-*)
6 *Verily man is to his Lord ungrateful.*
7 *Verily, he to that is witness,*
8 *And verily for the love of good is violent.*
9 *Does he not know? – When what is in the graves is ransacked,*
10 *And what is in the breasts is extracted,*
11 *Verily, their Lord that day will of them be well informed.*[18]

The first five verses, which contain the oath formula, depict a tableau. They present a single subject in successive stages of continuous and rapid motion: a group of horses whose riders (according to Ṭabarī's interpretation: *bi-rukbānihā*) are carrying out a raid (*ghazwa*; *mughīrāt*, Q. 100:3; *wasaṭna bihi jamʿā*, Q. 100:5). Their swift running (*ʿādiyāt*, Q. 100:1), which in the end comes to a sudden standstill in the camp of the enemy, is expressed by the particle *fa-*, implying progress.[19] The movement, explicitly qualified as *ighāra* (storming forward, Q. 100:3), is directed towards a fixed aim: to overcome the enemy by surprise, perhaps even while they are still asleep (*ṣubḥan*).[20]

The ensuing statement, beginning with Q. 100:6, refers to a different range of ideas in which man is blamed for being ungrateful or, more precisely, obstinate and greedy (*kanūd*, *li-ḥubbi'l-khayri la-shadīd*). These two vehement human psychical movements may be viewed as an echo of the forceful movements of the horses. We will refer to this particular reproduction of images effected by the oath cluster as a 'matrix of images'; it will reappear in the longer texts treated later on, where it is even more effective than in the short sura discussed here.

In the present text, however, we must find other evidence in order to discern the structural coherence that links the different parts of the sura. Looking closely at the oath cluster, we find that the tableau depicted there is left incomplete, its immanent tension – which leaves us wondering about the final goal of the movement – is unresolved: the description is interrupted at the very point where the attack on the enemy camp was expected to start. What will, however, leave a sustained impression on the listeners is the speed of the process and its sudden standstill, both of which convey a threatening sense of urgency. It is the last part of the sura that will present the clue for the understanding of the introductory tableau of the raid. In Q. 100:6, however, instead of the further development of the tableau, a general verdict on man's greed and his ingratitude to God is made, leading to a rhetorical question about man's knowledge of his eschatological fate (Q. 100:9). This again extends into a new scenario, describing

the upheaval that will take place on that last day, when the graves will be opened and men's souls will be searched. At this point, the listener is surprised to find that the imagery of the interrupted introductory tableau of the raid is continued. The passage containing the eschatological scenery (*idhā fuʿila* X, 'when X occurs', Q. 100:9–10) presents a picture that exactly presupposes the violent attack that was evoked in the sura's beginning: an inimical assault leading to the overturning of everything, since it portrays devastation, the dissipation of the crowd (*jamʿ*, Q. 100:5), the emptying of the most concealed receptacles (*mā fī'l-ṣudūr*, Q. 100:10). It is obvious that the attack presupposed here has been pre-empted by the prototypical tableau of the raiders portrayed in the oath cluster. Thus the tableau of Bedouin attackers taking the enemy by surprise is nothing less than a conceptualisation of the eschatological catastrophe; it is described in the terms of a social experience to which the listeners would be able to relate. A projection of images from the empirically known social context thus serves as a prototype for the yet-to-be experienced incidents leading up to the Day of Judgement.[21]

2. *Sūrat al-Nāziʿāt*[22]

Q. 79 (oath, Q. 79:1–5; eschatological scenery instead of emphatic statement, Q. 79:6–14)

1 *[By those that pull their reins vehemently*
2 *And move forth lively,* (*wa-*)
3 *That swim serenely,* (*wa-*)
4 *Then strive to be foremost,* (*fa-*)
5 *And finally direct the affair!]*[23] (*fa-*)
6 *On the day when the quake shall come,*
7 *That which rides behind following it*
8 *Hearts that day will be throbbing,*
9 *With looks downcast,*
10 *Saying: 'Are we verily brought back as we were before?*
11 *When we are bones decayed?'*
12 *They say: 'That is then a losing turn!'*
13 *But it is only one scaring shout.*
14 *And there they are wide awake.*

(Following this are retribution stories, Q. 79:15–33; eschatological topics, Q. 79:34–46)

There is no consensus among scholars as to the interpretation of the images within the oath cluster. As Bell explains, 'The usual interpretation regards [the

participles] as referring to the angels of death.'[24] Yet a more plausible interpretation is that the cluster refers to a host of riders, in accordance with the introductory passage of *Sūrat al-ʿĀdiyāt*. The interpretation that the *wa'l fāʿilāt* series refers to angels derives from traditional Islamic exegesis, presented by Ṭabarī, Zamakhsharī and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, which prefers to draw on religious iconography to explain the images. However, there is little indication of any particularly angelic behaviour in this passage;[25] the majority of the participles fit perfectly with the image of ridden animals as the actors of the particular motions.[26] The concluding statement of their directing (i.e. managing) of affairs (Q. 79:5), which presupposes reasoning and thus a human agency, may well be taken as applying to riders directing the animals, signifying their performance at the raid.

Based on the interpretation that the oath cluster refers to animals and riders undertaking a raid, there is strong structural congruity between the prototypical tableau depicted by the oaths and the eschatological scenery of the ensuing emphatic statement, as is seen in Q. 79:6–7: quite in accord with the host of riders, also, the first quake will be followed by another – the term *rādifa* (rides behind, Q. 79:7) evokes *radīf*, technically denoting a second rider sitting behind a first. Similarly, the uncontrolled movement of the hearts' throbbing (Q. 79:8) appears to echo the *nashṭ*, the 'lively' movement of the horses (Q. 79:2). The most important echo of the introductory section in the interior of the sura is, of course, the suddenness of arrival which is as true for the prototypical raiders (*ghuzzāt*) arriving in the early morning and stirring the sleeping enemies from drowsiness, as it is for the eschatological phenomena that will arouse the souls of the dead from sleep so that *On the day when they see it, it will be as if they had not tarried more than an evening, or its morning* (Q. 79:46).

3. *Sūrat al-Mursalāt*[27]

Q. 77 (oath, Q. 77:1–6; emphatic statement, Q. 77:7; eschatological scenery with paraenetic question, Q. 77:8–15)

1 *By those that are sent [continuously]*
2 *[Then come with hurricane blast,* (*fa-*)
3 *At times scatter around,* (*wa-*)
4 *At times divide asunder,* (*fa-*)
5 *And finally hurl reminders,]*[28] (*fa-*)
6 *. . . Excuse or warning,*
7 *Verily, what ye are promised is going to happen.*
8 *So when the stars are blotted out,*

9 *When the heaven is opened,*
10 *When the mountains are reduced to powder,*
11 *When the messengers are given their time,*
12 *For what day is the appointment made?*
13 *For the Day of Distinction.*
14 *What has let thee know what is the Day of Distinction?*
15 *Woe that day to those who count false!*

(Following this are *āyāt*, Q. 77:16–28; diptychs, Q. 77:29–45; polemics concerning the Qur'an, Q. 77:46–50)

The passage, although 'usually interpreted as referring to angels in their various activities' more probably applies to 'the winds bringing up the storm-clouds which give the picture of approaching doom'.[29] Again, we are confronted with a tableau of well arranged and continuous movement. The ability of inanimate objects in nature to perform worship, which may be intended by the *reminders* (sing. *dhikr*) specified in Q. 77:5, is not unusual as it is referred to in other suras.[30] Very much in accordance with *Sūrat al-Nāziʿāt*, the statement in Q. 77:7 speaks of the inevitability of the eschatological incidents. The prototypical tableau hints at particular aspects of the incidents to be expected: their being continuous (*ʿurfā*, Q. 77:1), their violent arrival (*ʿāṣifāt*, Q. 77:2), their hurling down (*mulqiyāt*, Q. 77:5) of catastrophic effects. The events will start from above, when *the stars* (*nujūm*) *are blotted out* (Q. 77:8) and the *heaven* (*samāʾ*) *is opened* (Q. 77:8), then touch on the elevated parts of the earth (i.e. the mountains, *jibāl*, Q. 77:10) until the divine decision itself occurs (*faṣl*, Q. 77:13). This part of *Sūrat al-Mursalāt* (Q. 77:1–15) closes with a warning phrase, which will reappear as a refrain throughout the rest of the sura.

If we observe the matrix of images, leaving aside the tension effected by the prototypical tableau, we find that although the eschatological topic itself is absent for a while (Q. 77:16–27), the matrix of images remains in effect throughout the entire sura. The refrain that is repeated ten times – *Woe that day to those who count false!* (Q. 77:15, 19, 24, 28, 34, 37, 40, 45, 47, 49) – serves as an audible recitation of the warning reminder (*dhikr*) of that which was announced in the tableau: *And finally hurl reminders,/Excuse or warning* (Q. 77:5–6). It is significant that the tableau of an impending storm, which is created in the introductory oath, is left incomplete at the point where the declarative statement is made (much as we saw in *Sūrat al-ʿĀdiyāt*), that is, at the very stage where the hurling down, the raining down of acoustically determined elements was announced to happen: these elements did not take meteorological shape, as the listener would have expected, but rather liturgical

shape, thus appearing as the articulation of *dhikr* (recitation). Thus the threat of the raining down of catastrophic phenomena, the precursors of imminent doom, suggested by the beginning of the oath cluster, is postponed. Instead, acoustically perceived drops of a rain *sui generis*, are bestowed; these are verses of *dhikr* – more precisely, of *dhikr* with warning import. These 'drops' are audible through the frequently repeated refrain which metaphorically falls continuously like rain throughout the whole sura.[31] Thus, the matrix of images of rain clouds, emanating from the prototypical tableau, reproduces the continuous effect of elements raining down, materialised through the refrain.

The tension that the tableau arouses in the listeners who may expect the idea of doom to be made explicit, in contrast to *Sūrat al-ʿĀdiyāt* where it was kept in suspense, is immediately relieved in the ensuing eschatological scenery (Q. 77:8–13). Yet the topic of transcendental retribution continues to dominate the second half of the sura (Q. 77:29–46), and the fatal consequences of not paying due respect to scriptural recitation (Q. 77:50, where *ḥadīth* recalls the *dhikr* of Q. 77:5) are stressed again in the closing verses (Q. 77:47–50).

4. *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt*[32]

Q. 51 (oath, Q. 51:1–4; emphatic statement, Q. 51:5–6; oath, Q. 51:7; emphatic statement, Q. 51:8–9; polemics, Q. 51:10–14)

1 *By those that scatter* [*swiftly*],
2 [*Then bear heavy burdens* (*fa-*)
3 *And go on running smoothly,* (*fa-*)
4 *And in the end distribute it,*][33] (*fa-*)
5 *Verily, what ye are promised is true,*
6 *And verily, the Judgement is about to fall.*
7 *By the heaven and its paths,*
8 *Lo, ye say different things,*
9 *And some about it are involved in lies.*
10 *Perish the conjecturers,*
11 *Who in deep waters drowse,*
12 *Asking: 'When is the Day of Judgement?'*
13 *On a day when on the Fire they shall be tried:*
14 *'Taste your trial; this is that ye were in a hurry for.'*

(Then follow diptychs and *āyāt*, Q. 51:10–23; retribution legends, Q. 51:24–46; *āyāt* and encouragement to the Prophet, Q. 51:47–60)

The oath cluster again presents a tableau of clouds, thus signalling a rain storm, and there is continuous movement until the storm reaches its

destination, the clouds being prototypes of particular eschatological features. In the end (Q. 51:6), it is announced that something not-yet-experienced will soon be coming down. In this oath cluster, the element that is about to fall (i.e. the judgement) is named explicitly, representing a deviation from the previous cases where the tension aroused by the tableau was upheld for some time. The matrix of images – the heavy clouds portending the imminent downfall of rain (understood as an ambiguous phenomenon) – proves very efficient: throughout the sura, the examples of retributive catastrophes are taken from among phenomena that are imagined to fall from heaven; thus the people of Lot are punished by stones of clay (*ḥijāra min ṭīn*, Q. 51:33), the people of ʿĀd are seized by a suffocating wind (*rīḥ ʿāqim*, Q. 51:41), those of Thamūd by a thunderstorm (*ṣāʿiqa*, Q. 51:44) and the people of Noah are extinguished by a flood brought on by excessive rain – this is merely alluded to and not explicitly mentioned (Q. 51:46), as the story would have been well known to those listening. The section containing the retribution legends also continues the matrix of images introduced in the oath cluster. Even the last part of the sura (Q. 51:47–60), introduced by a reminder of the creation of the heavens, comes to an end with an affirmation of God's ability to provide for man (*huwa'l-Razzāq*) with gifts, which – like the catastrophic phenomena mentioned before – will come down from heaven: *And in the heaven is your provision, and what ye are promised* (Q. 51:22). The last verse, *So woe to those who disbelieved, because of their day which they are promised* (Q. 51:60), finally resumes the warning tone of the refrain from *Sūrat al-Mursalāt*.

It is evident from this sura, counted among the later pieces within the first Meccan period, that the structural function of the introductory oath clusters has changed during the Meccan development. It still introduces a prototypical tableau of the imminent eschatological incidents but the enigma which was present in the early cases disappears in the later ones. The anticipation of the explicit mentioning of the eschatological phenomena is immediately dissolved. The second role of the oath cluster now emerges as all the more efficient in its function of providing a matrix of images for diverse, but related (in the listeners' minds), signs of divine omnipotence which are found dispersed over the whole sura.

5. *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*

Q. 37 (oath, Q. 37:1–3; emphatic statement, Q. 37: 4–5)

1 *By those who dress the ranks* [literally: 'stand or walk in closed rows'],
2 *[And] who scare by shouting,* (*fa-*)
3 *[And] who recite in warning,* (*fa-*)

4 *Verily, your God is One;*
5 *Lord of the heavens and the earth and of what is between them, and Lord of the rising-places* (*al-mashāriq*).[34]

(Then follows the myth of demons, Q. 37:6–10;[35] eschatological topics, polemics, Q. 37:11–74; retribution stories, Q. 37:75–148; encouragement of the Prophet, Q. 37:149–182)

This oath cluster, belonging to a sura of the second Meccan period, is the last one introduced by the type *wa'l-fāʿilāt . . .*; *inna . . .* It already occupies a special position. What we find here is no longer a tableau of features viewed as being in continuous movement but phenomena portrayed in different, uncoordinated, situations.[36] Also, we are no longer presented with phenomena belonging to the empirical sphere of man (functioning as the prototypes of those apparitions yet to appear on Judgement Day); instead, we are confronted with ghosts and angels. There is a formal change too: no longer do we find the usual semantic caesura between the oath formulae (Q. 37:1–3) and the ensuing statement (Q. 37:4–5). Rather, there exists a strong conceptual coherence between these two elements: the statement itself is like a text of the angelical *dhikr* which is in essence a continuous praise of God's oneness. Thus, the primary function of the oath clusters – to depict a prototypical tableau of the eschatological phenomena – has ceased to be productive.

What remains in force is the second function of the oath cluster, which is to act as a matrix of images: not only do the angels at the end of the sura proclaim themselves to be *those who dress the ranks* (*wa-inna la-naḥnu'l-ṣāffūn*, Q. 37:165) and *those who give glory* (*wa-inna la-naḥnu'l-musabbiḥūn*, Q. 37:166), but the image of *ṣaff* – enforced by the angels' activities of *zajr* (that is to say, their 'scaring shout' to announce Judgement Day or, as seems to be intended in this text, to expel the demons from the vicinity of the celestial council) and *dhikr* (the praise of God's unity) – suggests solid oneness. The image evoked by the oath cluster presents an emblem of unity and thus functions as an opposing image to the one generated by the hostile group, which consists of lower demons and their human followers. This group appears in different guises: as those trying to participate in the high (i.e. divine) council (*al-mala' al-aʿlā*, Q. 37:6–10); as doubters of Muhammad's claim to divine inspiration, attributing his message to the inspiration by jinn (Q. 37:158) and to madness (*junūn*, Q. 37:36); and as deniers of God's unity, saying He had begotten daughters embodied in the form of angels (Q. 37:149–50). Their host, who opposes unity, is confronted by the heavenly host's contingent (*jundanā*, Q. 37:173), who stand united. The confrontation between these two forces, which makes up the fundamental structure of the entire sura, serves to arouse a tense expectation

in the listener as to the outcome of the conflict. The heavenly contingent is, indeed, confirmed as being victorious in the end: *And verily Our host are the conquerors* (*wa-inna jundanā la-humu'l-ghālibūn*, Q. 37:173); this is evidently a reference to the imagery of the first verses of the oath cluster: *By those who dress the ranks* (*wa'l-ṣāffāti ṣāffā*, Q. 37:1). Finally, in the closing section, containing a hymnic exclamation, the angels themselves state that *We are those who give glory* (*wa-inna la-naḥnu'l-musabbiḥūn*, Q. 37:166), thus confirming that they are the ones that had been alluded to in the sura's introductory oath: *And who recite in warning* (*wa'l-tāliyāti dhikrā*, Q. 37:3). Their function referred to there is also affirmed in this section of the sura, where it is now verbalised: *They certainly are the ones who are to be helped* (*innahum la-humu'l-mansūrūn*, Q. 37:172).

Oaths alluding to sacred localities

We now turn to a small group of oath clusters that mainly refer to localities associated with particular theophanies that played an important role in salvation history. The one locality repeatedly mentioned in the oath clusters is Mecca; it appears once alone, and twice combined with Mount Sinai as the second site. In the three oath clusters, an immediately recognisable semantic coherence between the oath formulae and the emphatic statement that follows is missing.

1. *Sūrat al-Tīn*

Q. 95 (oath, Q. 95:1–3; emphatic statement, Q. 95:4–6; rhetorical question, Q. 95:7–8)[37]

1a *By the fig*
1b *And the olive,*[38]
2 *By Mount Sinai*
3 *[And] this [town]*[39] *secure,*
4 *Surely, We have created man most beautifully erect,*
5 *Then have rendered him the lowest of the low, –*
6 *Except those who have believed and wrought the works of righteousness; for them is a reward rightfully theirs.*
7 *What then, after (that) will declare thee false in regard to the Judgment?*
8 *Is not [God] the best of judges?*

The sura starts with oaths invoking a pair of fruit (or of fruit-bearing trees), followed by another pair, two localities. The ensuing emphatic statement takes a different semantic direction, however, speaking about man's demotion after creation: his falling back into decrepitude in old age after enjoying perfection

at the summit of his life (Q. 95:4–5). From this bipartite argument (Q. 95:6 is to be considered a later addition[40]), the conclusion (*fa-*) is drawn that the truth of the Day of Judgement can no longer be denied; the logical progression to this point is, however, not immediately evident and thus calls for an explanation. There is indeed a complex net of ideas hidden behind the apparently simple wording of the introductory section of the sura. In order to understand the role of the oath cluster for this sura, and the relationship existing among the three verse groups (oath cluster, emphatic statement and rhetorical question), we have to look closely at the oaths themselves. It is possible to interpret the two kinds of fruit or fruit-bearing trees simply in the way that vegetation is usually understood in the Qur'an: as signs of divine bounty, as examples of natural gifts granted by the creator to nourish and preserve his creatures. The ensemble of the fig (*tīn*) and the olive (*zaytūn*), however, suggests an additional symbolic meaning that is advocated by traditional Islamic exegetes as well who find in it an allusion to *al-Shām* (the Biblical Holy Land).[41] Regarding the two localities mentioned together as a pair, the first locality recalls the theophany, in this case, the visible manifestation of God to Moses, on Mount Sinai. The second refers to Mecca, which appears as a sacred precinct (*ḥaram*): *and this town secure* (*hādhā'l-balad al-amīn*, Q. 95:3) – a dignity owed to an earlier theophany of which a Meccan audience does not need to be reminded.

In Qur'anic reasoning, theophanies are understood as acts of divine communication entailing divine instruction (*ta'līm*). This is an understanding which is closely related to the idea of creation itself, since divine communications are generally presented in the same context, the most suggestive instance being the beginning of *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* (Q. 55:1–4) where the revelation of the Qur'an and the creation of man are spoken of together. Thus, in terms of salvation history, there is a time for man – beginning not with his physical genesis but with primordial divine instruction – a time which does not run cyclically as does physical time (Q. 95:4–5) but linearly, with the Day of Judgement as its destination. The oath cluster evokes a double beginning in its reference to both creation (the fruit-bearing trees symbolising that which was created for the support and preservation of man) and instruction (localities of theophanies symbolising God's communication with man). This evocation serves to arouse the listeners' anticipation of an equally double closure on Judgement Day: of the end of creation through physical annihilation at the conclusion of mankind's time on earth, and of man's rendering account of himself in relation to the divine instruction he had received in the course of salvation history. The latter expectation is fulfilled only at the very end of the sura where God is praised for being the best judge and the tenor of the sura returns to the hymn-like tone of the beginning.

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2. *Sūrat al-Balad*

Q. 90 (oath, Q. 90:1–5; emphatic statement, Q. 90:6–20)[42]

1 *I swear by this [town],*[43]
2 *– And thou art a freeman in this [town] –*
3 *And by parent and offspring,*
4 *Verily We have created man in trouble.*
5 *Does he think that no one will have power over him?*
6 *He says: 'I have wasted wealth untold';*
7 *Does he think that no one has seen him?*
8 *Have We not given him two eyes,*
9 *A tongue and two lips,*
10 *And have guided him the two paths?*
11 *But he has not attempted the steep!*
12 *What has let thee know what is the steep?*
13 *Setting free of bondmen* [or the freeing of a neck (*raqaba*), the site of the cord worn by slaves],
14 *Or feeding on a day of famine*
15 *An orphan of kin*
16 *Or a destitute (person) downtrodden.*
17 *And then [he who does so] has become one of those who have believed and who counsel each other to endurance and to compassion.*
18 *These are the fellows of the right (hand).*
19 *But those who have disbelieved in Our signs – they are the fellows of the left (hand).*
20 *Over them is a fire closed in.*

Here, the oaths are understood to refer to one locality only, Mecca, but this is put forward in a rather emphatic tone since the following verse stresses the origins of the addressee from this very place. In the introductory oath cluster of this sura, as in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, the idea of physical creation appears alongside the idea of divine instruction, alluded to in the oaths. Creation is represented here by procreation, which establishes the most elementary nucleus of human social life. Once again, in this sura, the incipit which raises the two ideas of creation and instruction serves to arouse the listener's expectation of hearing how the covenant implicit in these two divine gifts is to be fulfilled (and ultimately about the decision of each individual's fate on the Day of Judgement). This expectation is not yet dissolved by the statement immediately following, which again raises the idea of man's deficiency, even ambivalence, discernible from the time of creation and manifest in his heedlessness of eschatological matters (Q. 90:6–7). It is only the ensuing

admonition (Q. 90:8–16) that reconnects to the idea of accountability, translating the two symbols introduced in the oath cluster – Mecca as an age-old locality of theophany, and thus of divine instruction, and procreation as a fundamental act establishing social life – from psychologically reassuring certainties into reminders of mankind's moral obligations. It is noteworthy that both the appeal to the divine gift of reason granted to man (Q. 90:8–9) and the instructions themselves (Q. 90:13–16) are built on metaphors of the body. Only then is the tension suspended by an evocation of the transcendental retribution (Q. 90:17–20).

Turning to the literary aspects, the admonitory passage – particularly, the matrix of images emanating from the oath cluster – proves to be very efficient. The reference to 'town' (*balad*) and 'offspring' (*walada*) leads up to several topographic specifications on the one hand, and a number of physiological or social concepts on the other. *Balad* as a topographical concept is echoed in the reference to the two paths (*najdayn*, Q. 90:10) and, above all, in the steep (*ʿaqaba*, Q. 90:11). *Walada* is echoed on the physiological level by names of organs like the eyes (*ʿaynayn*, Q. 90:8), the tongue and lips (*lisān* and *shafatayn*, Q. 90:9), and neck (*raqaba*, Q. 90:13); as well as through physiologically relevant issues such as feeding and famine (*iṭʿām* and *masghaba* respectively, Q. 90:14); and finally on the social level by reference to slaves (Q. 90:13), orphans/kin (*yatīm*/*maqraba*, Q. 90:15) and those who are destitute (*miskīn*, Q. 90:16). The town evolves into a macrocosm that is reflective of the microcosm of man, whose nature is structured symmetrically; both demand that their harmonious structures be respected in order to be pleasing to God.

3. *Sūrat al-Ṭūr*[44]

Q. 52 (oath, Q. 52:1–6; emphatic statement, Q. 52:7–12)

1 *By the Mount,*
2 *[And] a [Scripture] written,*
3 *In parchment unrolled,*
4 *By the House frequented,*
5 *By the roof upraised,*
6 *By the sea filled full,*
7 *Verily, the punishment of thy Lord is about to fall;*
8 *Of it there is no averter;*
9 *On the day when the heaven shall shake,*
10 *And the mountains go on their travels.*
11 *Woe then to those who count false,*
12 *Those who in vain discourse do play.*

(Then follow eschatological topics, Q. 52:13–28; polemics, Q. 52:29–47; an exhortation to perform liturgical service, Q. 52:48–9)

Very much like the introductory section of *Sūrat al-Tīn*, this oath cluster invokes two localities related to theophany: Mount Sinai and Mecca (represented by the House). Both are clearly recognisable as symbols, since they are combined with each other through two other monotheistic emblems: the scripture (*kitāb masṭūr*) and parchment (*raqq*). Mecca, additionally, is mentioned as a centre of pilgrimage – *the House frequented* (*bayt maʿmūr*, Q. 52:4). In this sura, the idea of creation, which on the basis of the two previous texts we may expect to be mentioned in this context, is represented by reference to the celestial arch and the sea (Q. 52:5–6). However, contrary to the suras discussed earlier, the statement immediately following the oath resolves the tension created in the listener: an eschatological scene follows straight away, which leads to a diptych (Q. 52:13–28), thus completing the fulfilment of the listener's anticipation of the eschatological account.

The sura, having thus reached its first climax by Q. 52:12, continues with a polemical discourse which deals with the conflicting views of opponents on the nature of the inspiration granted to Muhammad. It is claimed variously to be due to magic (Q. 52:15), to be related to the inspiration of the soothsayers (Q. 52:29) or the poets (Q. 52:30), or to be the result of madness (Q. 52:29). All these suppositions, strongly reminiscent of those raised in *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*, are again warded off – not as in *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* by the contingent of the heavenly host standing in closed rows, but by the scripture which had been evoked in Q. 52:2. The scripture is as much the symbol of God's message to man as it is the symbol of the genuineness of Muhammad's inspiration. This sign of truth serves to warrant the victory of Muhammad's claim against all the suppositions that work to dissipate unity. It is not surprising to find in this sura the earliest explicit wording of what later becomes a *locus probans* (probative quotation) for the inimitability of the Qur'an: *Let them produce a discourse like it, if they speak the truth* (Q. 52:34).[45]

Sūrat al-Ṭūr is thus another instance of a later developed Meccan oath cluster which has lost much of its primary function of arousing the listeners' expectation of the explication of a particular idea; in this type of oath, this idea would have been that creation and divine instruction necessitate man's rendering account of himself on the Day of Judgement. Instead, the matrix of images presented in the incipit prove to be very productive: the reference to the scripture and its accompanying details serve to keep foremost in the listeners' minds the idea that even the material sign of the new monotheistic faith is a warrant for the truth of the message.

Only in one later sura do we find another introductory oath referring to particular details concerning this symbol: *Nun/By the Pen, and what they write* (Q. 68:1). All the other instances of introductory oaths referring to attributes of the Qur'an or *kitāb* only add praising qualifications like 'by the clear scripture' (*wa'l-kitābi'l-mubīn*), for example. Usually, however, the incipits of the suras following this one are restricted to a passing reference to the scripture, simply clad in the grammatical form of a statement. It is interesting to note that of the diverse images encountered in the three oath clusters referring to sacred localities, only the most abstract – the mere sign – scripture (*kitāb*) finally remains in use. There is a tendency, it appears, towards abbreviation, abstraction and the employment of cipher.

Oath Clusters Referring to the Phases of the Day and Night, and to Cosmic Phenomena

General observations

The oath clusters that remain to be discussed are the most extensive and, at the same time, the most complicated; they are the oaths that refer to the phases of the day and night, and to particular celestial phenomena. These oaths, like those already discussed, do not show any distinctive coherence with the passages that follow them. They are, however, significantly different insofar as they do not refer to natural phenomena (which stand as the prototypes of eschatological incidents to come) or to sacred localities (symbolising the theophanies indicative of divine instruction) but rather pick up either totally abstract items such as the phases of time or their visible signs, the celestial phenomena. Often, these oaths are to be found within clusters referring to other equally abstract subjects. What then is the additional emphasis made by these kinds of oaths? What function do they serve? In the following section, an explanation will be proposed that might throw new light on the group of suras involved as well as on some other related groups of early Meccan suras.

The most striking characteristic of these suras is the almost stereotypical theme of the passages that follow the oath clusters. In several cases the ensuing statement itself affirms the genuineness of Muhammad's revelation, and may be understood as directed to the addressee personally. This is seen in the following verses:

Q. 93:1–5:

1 *By the morning brightness*
2 *By the night when it is still,*

(Then follow eschatological topics, Q. 52:13–28; polemics, Q. 52:29–47; an exhortation to perform liturgical service, Q. 52:48–9)

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Q. 93:1–5:

1 *By the morning brightness*
2 *By the night when it is still,*

3 *Thy Lord has not taken leave of thee, nor despised thee*
. . .
5 *Assuredly in the end thy Lord will give thee to thy satisfaction.*

Q. 81:15–19:
15 *(Verily) I swear by (the stars) that lag,*
16 *That run, and that fade away,*
17 *By the night when it lingers,*
18 *By the morning when it breathes;*
19 *It is verily the speech of a noble messenger;*

Q. 56:74–7:
74 *(Verily) I swear by the places where fall the stars –*
75 *A mighty oath if ye only knew!*
76 *Verily it is a Qur'ān noble*

And perhaps also:

Q. 89:1–4:
1 *By the dawn and [the] ten nights,*
2 *By the even and the odd,*
3 *By the night when it runs its course;*
4 *Is there in that an oath for a man of sense?*

In other cases, this particular allusion to the close relationship between the divine speaker and the believer is to be found at the end of the sura; there, the address to the Prophet may be substituted by words referring to or directed towards pious believers. The addressee has arrived at a new level of consciousness; he has attained contentment (*riḍā, yarḍā, tarḍā, rāḍiya, marḍīyyā*), favour (*niʿma*) and peace (*iṭmiʾnān, muṭmaʾinna*):

Q. 93
1 *By the morning brightness*
. . .
11 *And as for the goodness of the Lord, discourse of (it)*

Q. 56
74 *(Verily) I swear by the places where fall the stars*
. . .
96 *So give glory in the name of thy Lord, the Mighty*

Q. 85
1 *By the heaven decked with constellations*
. . .

21 *Nay, it is a glorious Qur'ān*
22 *In a tablet preserved*

Q. 81
15 *(Verily) I swear by (the stars) that lag,*
. . .
27 *It is nothing less than a reminder to the worlds;*
28 *To whoever of you wills to act straight;*

Q. 92
1 *By the night when it veils,*
2 *By the day when it shines out in splendour,*
. . .
19 *Though to no one does he rest under a favour needing to be recompensed,*
20 *But only out of desire for the countenance of his Lord, the Most High;*
21 *And assuredly, he shall be satisfied.*

Q. 89
1 *By the dawn and* [the] *ten nights,*
. . .
27 *O thou trustful soul,*
28 *Return to thy Lord, approving and approved;*
29 *Enter amongst my servants,*
30 *Enter my garden*[46]

How can this apparently intimate and personal relationship between the divine speaker and his human addressee(s) – which we find expressed in terms of divine–human relationships (*ibtighāʾ wajh al-rabb, niʿmat al-rabb, dhikr liʾl-ʿālamīn*[47]) and, even more distinctly, in terms of human psychic conditions (*rāḍī, marḍī, muṭmaʾinn, mustaqīm*[48]) in this type of sura – be plausibly explained? What is the relationship between the introductory oaths' references to the phases of the day and the night, and the ensuing statements' indication of a direct communication between mankind and the Divine? In order to approach this problem let us remember the temporal framework of the genesis of the suras.

Several Qur'anic passages explicitly state that the suras emerged from nightly devotional practices performed by the Prophet in order to attain a more intimate communication with the divine speaker. It is only when we become conscious of the intrinsic relation between particular time phases and the recitation of liturgical texts that the seemingly unusual hymnic quality characterising this type of sura becomes fully understandable. It is the language of liturgical services with which we are confronted in these suras.

Thanks to Qur'anic accounts we are well informed about the approximate timing of these devotional practices, their temporal extension and the particulars of the actual performance of these exercises. *Sūrat al-Muzzammil* (Q. 73), for instance, speaks of an exercise extending over about half the night:

Q. 73:1–7[49]

1 *O thou heavily burdened one,*
2 *Stay up the night, except a little*
3 *– Half of it, or a little less,*
4 *or a little more – And arrange the* [*reading*] *distinctly;*
5 *Lo, We shall cast upon thee a weighty word,*
6 *The beginning of the night is strongest in impression, and most just in speech.*
7 *Verily thou hast in the day-time long toil*

Similarly, more explicit indications that the revelation of suras was granted during liturgical exercises performed at night are expressed in the two hymns, Q. 97:1–5 and Q. 44:1–7, on *laylat al-qadr*, the night during which Muhammad, according to traditional accounts, received his first revelation. In Q. 52:49: *And during the night give glory to Him, and at the withdrawal of the stars*, the time of the nightly liturgical exercise is made more precise by the reference to the setting of the stars, thus indicating that the devotion was occurring during the late phase of the night. In Q. 17:78: *Observe the Prayer at the sinking of the sun until the darkening of the night, and the recitation at the dawn; – verily the recitation at the dawn is well-attested*, sunset and the time shortly before sunrise (*fajr*) are especially recommended for liturgical exercises. Similarly in Q. 50:39–40: *So endure patiently under what they say, and give glory with praise of thy Lord before the rising of the sun and before the setting,/And part of the night give glory to Him, and at the backs of the prostration*, the merits of the nightly prayers are stressed (see also later comparable passages: Q. 20:130, Q. 11:114, Q. 40:55, Q. 6:52).

Relying exclusively on explicit Qur'anic evidence, we are confronted with two important liturgical times:[50] a prayer time around sunset and another during the night, part of which, perhaps half of it (*nişfahu*), was used for vigils, exercises that may have concluded with a prayer shortly before sunrise. The first-mentioned prayer time is easily identified with *'asr*, alluded to by the isolated introductory oath of *Sūrat al-'Aṣr* (Q. 103). As soon as we take additional evidence from Hadith into account, a third prayer time, also falling in the early morning, emerges, namely *ḍuḥā* (morning); this prayer is to be performed soon after sunrise.

Returning to the oath clusters referring to time phases, we now easily recognise in several instances time phases particularly designated for liturgical

service: *By the afternoon* (Q. 103:1); *By the dawn* (Q. 89:1); *By the night when it runs its course* (Q. 89:4); *By the night when it veils* (Q. 92:1); *By the morning brightness,/By the night when it is still* (Q. 93:1–2); *By the sun and his morning brightness* (Q. 91:1); *By the day when it reveals its splendour* (Q. 91:3); *By the night when it lingers* (Q. 81:17); *By the night when it draws back* (Q. 74:33). The following section will pursue the hypothesis proposed earlier and thus analyse the suras of this type as compositions based on the vivid memory of a celebrant's spiritual experience during prayer. The oath cluster, with its repetitive allusions to the changing light conditions that dominate the atmosphere of the service, should be understood as the preservation of the visible aspects of the otherwise untranslatable consciousness of nearness to the divine speaker which is still present in the pious addressee's mind.

Oath clusters referring to phases of the day and night

1. *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā*[51]

Q. 93 (oath, Q. 93:1–2; emphatic statement, Q. 93:3–5, expanded into a divine reminder, Q. 93:6–11)

1 *By the morning brightness,*
2 *By the night when it is still,*
3 *Thy Lord hath not taken leave of thee, nor despised thee.*
4 *The last is for thee better than the first;*
5 *Assuredly in the end thy Lord will give thee to thy satisfaction.*
6 *Did He not find thee an orphan and give* (*thee*) *shelter?*
7 *Did He not find thee erring, and guide* (*thee*)?
8 *Did He not find thee poor, and enrich* (*thee*)?
9 *So as for the orphan, be not* (*thou*) *overbearing;*
10 *And as for the beggar, scold not;*
11 *And as for the goodness of thy Lord, discourse* (*of it*).

The short cluster first evokes *ḍuḥā*, which, as Uri Rubin has shown in a study of the liturgical practices of the pre-Islamic Meccans,[52] was the time in the early morning when prayers of thanksgiving were traditionally performed. Doubtlessly, *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā* bears witness to a thanksgiving. One might ask why night (*layl*) is mentioned as a second time phase after *ḍuḥā*. It seems legitimate to assume that if *ḍuḥā* is evoked in its liturgical function (i.e. as the time of the prayer of thanksgiving), then *layl* may be a reminiscence of preceding vigils. The experience of the nightly liturgical exercises is still vividly remembered by the celebrant. This is suggested by the exultant tone of the statement following the oaths, which indicates the achievement of a new consciousness: a tormenting fear has been removed (Q. 93:3) and encouraging

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expectations have been aroused (Q. 93:4), culminating in the desired condition of contentment. Further assurances and proof of God's tangible improvements are outlined in the rest of the sura. The function of the contrasting pair, day/night, provides a structural matrix for the ensuing pair of oppositions: as the light of day follows night, so too will peace follow distress. The closing verse (Q. 93:11) shows the way to transmit divine guidance to other men, namely, through recitation. The sura has now come full circle: with this exhortation to recite, it refers again to the spiritual experience of the night vigils and the early morning prayer, perhaps *ḍuḥā* prayer itself, evoked in the introductory oaths.

Parallels in other suras reinforce this interpretation: in the interior part of *Sūrat al-Takwīr* (Q. 81), an oath cluster referring to celestial phenomena and phases of the night and early morning is followed by a statement about the reception of a revelation, which in this case appears within a vision in Q. 81:15–19 (verses given earlier in this chapter).[53] There is consensus in Islamic tradition that many revelations, including the Prophet's visions, occurred during nightly vigils.[54] Thus, the two experiences – of the vigil and the reception of revelation – constitute the bipartite ensemble of the oath and its ensuing statement. As a further example corroborating the interpretation, Q. 56:74–80 may be cited; there, the isolated oath at Q. 56:74 is followed by a statement affirming that the Qur'an was genuinely revealed by God.

2. *Sūrat al-Layl*[55]

Q. 92 (oath, Q. 92:1–3; emphatic statement, Q. 92:4, followed by the classification of men as either believers or unbelievers, Q. 92:5–21)

1 *By the night when it veils,*
2 *By the day when it shines out in splendour,*
3 *By what created the male and the female,*
4 *Verily your course is diverse.*
5 *So as for him who gives and shows piety,*
6 *And counts true the best (reward),*
7 *We shall assist him to ease.*
8 *But as for him who is [miserly] and prides himself in wealth,*
9 *And counts false the best (reward),*
10 *We shall assist him to difficulty,*
11 *Nor will his wealth profit him when he perishes.*
12 *Upon Us it rests to give guidance;*
13 *And to Us belong the Last and the First.*
14 *So I warn you of a fire that blazes,*
15 *In which shall roast only the most miserable,*

16 *Who has counted false and turned away;*
17 *Avoid it shall the most pious,*
18 *Who gives of his wealth to purify himself,*
19 *Though to no one does he rest under a favour needing to be recompensed,*
20 *But only out of desire for the countenance of his Lord, the most High,*
21 *And assuredly, he shall be satisfied.*

This oath cluster starts, like the ones discussed before, with an evocation of the times that are apt for vigils. The counterpart of night, 'day', follows and also a succession of names for phenomena that become more and more worldly. The two sexes form the first contrasting pair; the second pair contains the contrasting endeavours of the fellow Meccans who are addressed directly in Q. 92:4 (where it says 'your course', *saʿyakum*). It is the two basic oppositions of the oath cluster – day/night and male/female – that constitute the structural matrix for all the other oppositions: the contrary endeavours of men and their contrary retributions. Only the concluding verses of the sura finally break the pattern of oppositions, one causing the other: it is the righteous man who – *out of desire for the countenance of his Lord* (Q. 92:20) overcomes his worldly desires and who in renouncing the world of oppositions strives for the experience of unity – will, in the end, be granted his desire. Does this experience of partaking in divine unity not lead back to the idea presented at the beginning – the experience of vigils and *ḍuḥā* prayer as reflected in the oath cluster?

3. *Sūrat al-Shams*[56]

Q. 91 (oath, Q. 91:1–8; emphatic statement Q. 91:9–10, followed by an exclamation about the eschatological fate of the just and the evildoers)[57]

1 *By the sun and his morning brightness,*
2 *[And] the moon when she follows him,*
3 *By the day when it reveals his splendour,*
4 *[And] the night when it veils him,*
5 *By the heaven and what built it,*
6 *[And] the earth and what spread it out,*
7 *By the soul and what formed it,*
8 *And implanted in it its wickedness and piety,*
9 *Prospered has he who purifies it,*
10 *Failed has he who corrupts it.*

(Then follows the retribution story of Thamūd, Q. 91:11–15)

This oath cluster is full of contrasting pairs. At first glance it could appear that the idea of desired human participation in divine unity evoked by the word

ḍuḥā is buried completely under the host of oppositions dominating creation. It is only after the oppositions among the bodies of heaven (Q. 91:1–4) and of earth (Q. 91:5–6) that the oppositions in man's nature are introduced (Q. 91:7–8). The long catalogue, with its somewhat didactic tone, enhances the listener's anticipation of a break in the presentation of the contraries, until the final releasing praise is given to those who have succeeded in making the right choice (Q. 91:9–10). The ensuing retribution story exemplifies the wrong choice.

4. *Sūrat al-Fajr*[58]

Q. 89 (oath, Q. 89:1–4; emphatic statement, Q. 89:5, followed by retribution story, Q. 89:6–7)

1 *By the dawn,*
2 *And [the] ten nights,*
3 *By the even and the odd,*
4 *By the night when it runs its course;*
5 *Is there in that an oath for a man of sense?*
6 *Hast thou not seen how thy Lord did with 'Ad,*
7 *Iram of the pillars;*
8 *The like of whom was never created in the country;*
9 *And Thamūd, who bored the rock in the Wādi,*
10 *And Pharaoh of the stakes; . . .*

(There follows the continuation of the retribution stories, Q. 89:11–20; eschatological topics, Q. 89:21–30)

In this oath cluster the first mentioned time phase, dawn, no longer appears in the context of a contrast. That it is to be understood as an allusion to a particular time phase that marks a transition period between night and day is clearly affirmed by its parallel in Q. 89:2: *the ten nights*, which refers to the first ten nights of the month of pilgrimage (*Dhū'l-Ḥijja*).[59] The 'ten nights' may thus be considered as a kind of amplified dawn, one of calendrical dimensions. In concord with the dawn, which is a limited period during which it is auspicious to perform liturgical exercises, the first ten nights of the month of *Dhū'l-Ḥijja* are likewise considered to be a defined period (between a pre-festival profane time and a post-festival profane time) during which liturgical exercises are considered to be particularly meritorious.[60]

After the pair of oaths referring to the two congruent phases – the dawn/the ten nights – a third oath follows mentioning the contrary pair of even and odd (*shaf'* and *witr*). An oath referring to the course of the night, which

again can be heard as an allusion to the time of previous vigils,[61] serves to complete the oath cluster. A statement in the usual sense is missing; instead, a rhetorical question as to the evidence of the oaths ensues.[62] Thereupon follows the evocation of several retribution stories exemplifying periods of historical transition which were fatally decisive for the communities involved: several of those groups in earlier salvation history, though possessed of exterior greatness, fell victim to divine retribution because they did not realise their *kairos* (i.e. the moment propitious for their salvation).[63] The Meccans, to whom the sura is addressed, who would have been experiencing a comparable period of transition, are in danger of missing their *kairos* as well – so it appears from the rueful exclamations it is anticipated they will articulate on Judgement Day (Q. 89:24). The original concluding part of the sura has perhaps not been preserved, but supposing that the last verses of the present concluding section are merely an amplified version of the earlier end of the sura, it is again possible to speak of a correlation between the beginning and the end of the sura: the pious soul addressed in the last verses (Q. 89:27) has gained confidence and peace through the assurance of divine nearness, by partaking in divine unity. This state of mind is arrived at through the liturgical exercises alluded to in the beginning.

Oath clusters referring to cosmic phenomena: Textual evidence

A quite different tone dominates the following suras whose oath clusters again presuppose a phase of the night: they do not, however, name it directly, but refer to the stars or other celestial phenomena. In these suras, the liturgical experience of the vigils does not result in the reverent tone of a hymn of thanksgiving. Instead, it conveys a feeling of assurance, of confidence not only in the integrity and truth of the revelation, but also in its final victoriousness at being able to provide sufficient strength to provoke the enemies of the Qur'an, and to ward them off by threatening them with eschatological retribution.

1. *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq*[64]

Q. 86 (oath, Q. 86:1–3; emphatic statement, Q. 86:4, followed by admonition, Q. 86:5–10; oath, Q. 86:11–12; emphatic statement, Q. 86:13–14, followed by admonition, Q. 86:15–17)

1 *By the heaven and the Meteor, –*
2 *What has let thee know what is the Meteor?*
3 *The piercing star.*

4 *Over every soul is assuredly a watcher.*
5 *And let man look – from what was he created?*
6 *He was created from water dripping,*
7 *Which cometh forth from between the loins and the ribs.*
8 *Verily He hath power to bring him back*
9 *On the day when the secrets will be tried,*
10 *And he will have neither strength nor helper.*
11 *By the heaven which returns,*
12 *By the earth which splits,*
13 *Verily it is a saying distinct.*
14 *It is no frivolity.*
15 *Lo they devise a stratagem,*
16 *And I devise a stratagem.*
17 *So respite the unbelievers, and give them respite a little.*

The sura, entirely filled with warning locutions, contains two oath clusters referring to celestial phenomena visible at night (Q. 86:1–3 and Q. 86:11–12), both of which form introductions to the first and the second part respectively. The first reference, Q. 86:1–3, is not an oath cluster in the usual sense but an isolated oath, amplified by a didactic question and its answer. No associations with hymns emerge in this sura; instead, the eschatological threat implicit in the didactic question is enhanced by the statement in Q. 86:3–4 that man's supervision by the heavenly observer is facilitated by the light sent down from heaven. In any case, man's pride has lost its foundation since the new brightness has exposed his base origins. What is presented obliquely through images in the first main part is made explicit in the second. The word of the revelation will enhance man's faculties of understanding and cognition and will thus also make his obligations more binding, as has been exemplified by the effect of the extremely bright star. The new phase in salvation history having begun will now cut through the cycle of the customary course of natural events (Q. 86:11–12), suggesting a vain sense of security. It will lead to a phase of trial and culminate in the account owed by man (Q. 86:9). The piercing star of the beginning turns out to be an image that reflects the later idea that the decisive word of God (*qawlun faṣl*) facilitates man's insight (*naẓar*) into the disparity between human and divine power, and justifies the functioning of the heavenly observer. It is worth noting that the second oath cluster (Q. 86:11–12), whose first verse evokes a night sky,[65] is followed by a statement affirming the truth of the revelation (Q. 86:13–14), without the threat being suspended, in such a way as to ensure that the truth remains unimpaired by the disbelieving opponents.[66]

2. *Sūrat al-Burūj*

Q. 85 (oath, Q. 85:1–3; eschatological curse instead of an emphatic statement, Q. 85:4–7)[67]

1 *By heaven decked with constellations,*
2 *And by the Promised Day,*
3 *By witness and what is witnessed,*
4 *Slain be the fellows of the Pit,*
5 *The Fire fed with fuel!*
6 *See them by it sitting*
7 *While they of what they do with the believers are witnesses.*[68]

Again, the introduction of night in the first verse of the oath cluster leads immediately to a warning locution, evoking first the Day of Judgement itself and then alluding to the divine observation of humankind. It is striking to find the second verse of the cluster referring to the Day of Judgement – usually an idea itself in need of corroboration – as a subject contributing evidence of the truth of the Qur'an.[69] In a later sura, *Sūrat al-Qiyāma* (Q. 75), the oath cluster as well as the statement is completely filled with visions of the Day of Judgement:

Q. 75:1–3:

1 *I swear not by the resurrection day;*
2 *I swear not by the blame-casting soul;*
3 *Does man think that we shall not (re-)assemble his bones?*

The shift of the oath clusters from functional bipartite units, exhibiting tension between the oaths and the statement, to purely ornamental elements without any semantic thrust, and thus lacking the power to build up a structure of anticipation, can already be noticed in *Sūrat al-Burūj*. A statement in the usual sense is missing. Instead, there is a curse directed towards a group – *the fellows of the Pit* – whose eschatological retribution is anticipated in a foreshadowing (Q. 85:4–6). The sura's original shape was amplified in a later sura by lengthy interpretations of the words *witness* (*shāhid*) and *witnessed* (*mashhūd*) in Q. 85:3. Originally, the foreshadowing in Q. 85:4–6 was continued by the hymn (Q. 85:13–16) which served to re-establish the balance for those who were not as guilty as the *fellows of the pit*. They are consoled with the reminder in Q. 85:7: . . . *the believers have witnesses*. Allusions to two retribution legends follow (Q. 85:17–18), which lead to a reproach directed against the unbelievers (Q. 85:19–20) who are confronted with the integrity of the revelation (Q. 85:21–2). In this section of the sura, very much like the ones previously treated,[70] the image of the night sky structured by celestial phenomena

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3 *Does man think that we shall not (re-)assemble his bones?*

The shift of the oath clusters from functional bipartite units, exhibiting tension between the oaths and the statement, to purely ornamental elements without any semantic thrust, and thus lacking the power to build up a structure of anticipation, can already be noticed in *Sūrat al-Burūj*. A statement in the usual sense is missing. Instead, there is a curse directed towards a group – *the fellows of the Pit* – whose eschatological retribution is anticipated in a foreshadowing (Q. 85:4–6). The sura's original shape was amplified in a later sura by lengthy interpretations of the words *witness* (*shāhid*) and *witnessed* (*mashhūd*) in Q. 85:3. Originally, the foreshadowing in Q. 85:4–6 was continued by the hymn (Q. 85:13–16) which served to re-establish the balance for those who were not as guilty as the *fellows of the pit*. They are consoled with the reminder in Q. 85:7: . . . *the believers have witnesses*. Allusions to two retribution legends follow (Q. 85:17–18), which lead to a reproach directed against the unbelievers (Q. 85:19–20) who are confronted with the integrity of the revelation (Q. 85:21–2). In this section of the sura, very much like the ones previously treated,[70] the image of the night sky structured by celestial phenomena

serves as a backdrop for the experience of confidence in the truth and continuity of the revelation granted to Muhammad. The unbelievers cannot injure its integrity, an idea that is assured at the end of the sura by a particularly persuasive image: *Nay, it is a glorious Qur'ān/In a preserved tablet* (Q. 85:21–2).

Conclusion

What justifies the classification of suras with introductory oath clusters as specific types? In trying to provide an answer, rather than point to the existence of such obvious traits as common topics or patterns of composition, we should refer to a more intricate characteristic – the immanent dynamics dominant in these suras. This particular dynamic quality is formally due to the accumulation of parallel phrases in the introductory section that creates a vivid rhythm of its own, and is structurally due to the anticipation of a solution of the enigma raised in the listener's mind by the amassed metaphorical elements which are not immediately comprehensible, or at least plausible, to him. This dynamism, created in the entire sura by the introductory oath clusters, is the main characteristic of the text group investigated.

There are, of course, typologically related introductory sections in the Qur'an – especially the eschatological sceneries with their clusters of *idhā* phrases – that build up a rhythmical incipit; the tension in these, however, is resolved immediately in the ensuing statement. It is different with the oath clusters: in the case of the *fā'ilāt* clusters, an explication of the ideas presented in the cluster is fulfilled only at the end of the sura (or at the end of the first main part). It is only in the later suras, those from the later part of the first Meccan period, that the anticipation is fulfilled immediately in the ensuing statement. The oath clusters had thus changed from functional units into merely ornamental devices over that period of time. In the case of the suras introduced by oath clusters referring to symbols of creation and instruction, the anticipation of the ideas of Judgement Day and the rendering of account is suspended in a similar way and fulfilled only at the end of the sura or, again, at the end of the first main part.

In those suras where the introductory oath clusters refer to the phases of the day and night, we find a somewhat different structure of anticipation. In these suras, it is true, a hymnic tone or, in the case of oath clusters referring to celestial phenomena, a polemical tone remains audible throughout the entire sura. In both types, however, it is the ever-stressed opposition between created beings, structurally prefigured through the contrast of light and darkness, which arouses the anticipation of a final affirmation of the unity of the creator;

this unity alone gives meaning to the oppositions in the realm of created beings. Indeed, the concluding sections of these suras speak of the believer's nearness to the divine speaker; thus, they lead back to the experience of divine unity felt during the liturgy and Qur'anic recitation to which the images in the introductory sections alluded.

In addition, the oath clusters appeared to function as a matrix of images which proved productive in all the various types of suras discussed above. It is, of course, particularly prominent in the later and more extended suras where the primary function of the oath clusters, to arouse a tension toward the explication of the enigma present at the beginning, has become faint and where the attention of the listener can concentrate on particular, structurally important, images bearing symbolic value.

Not merely by coincidence, the standard incipit characteristic of so many later Meccan and even Medinan suras emerges from one of these types of introductory oaths clusters. In the end, the image of the scripture, of *al-kitāb*,[71] alone remains in use – the most abstract of all the different symbols used, essentially no more than a mere sign. The 'writing', or the 'scripture', is thus the only relic from among a complex ensemble of the manifold accessories of revelation originally comprising cosmic, vegetative, topographic, cultic and social elements. Thus, by the end of the early Meccan period, the scripture – the symbol of the revelation par excellence – had acquired the cachet which was preserved throughout the Qur'anic proclamation and which makes it the noblest emblem of Islam today.

Appendix: List of the Qur'anic Oath Clusters Discussed

Oaths of the type *wa-X*

Sura	Syntactical structure[72]	Subject	Type
Q. 36:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+Adj	*qur'ān ḥakīm*	emblem: corpus of recitation
Q. 37:1	*wa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*ṣāffāt*	emblem: host of angels
Q. 37:2	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*zājīrāt*	host of angels
Q. 37:3	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*tāliyāt*	host of angels
Q. 38:1	*wa*=S(Gen)*dhī*=constrS	*qur'ān dhī dhikr*	emblem: corpus of recitation

(*Continued*)

Oaths of the type *wa-X* – continued

Sura	Syntactical structure[72]	Subject	Type
Q. 43:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+Adj	*kitāb mubīn*	emblem: book
Q. 44:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+Adj	*kitāb mubīn*	emblem: book
Q. 50:1	*wa*=S(Gen)+Adj	*qur'ān majīd*	emblem: corpus of recitation
Q. 51:1	*wa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*dhāriyāt*	tableau: storm clouds
Q. 51:2	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*ḥāmilāt*	storm, clouds
Q. 51:3	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*jāriyāt*	storm, clouds
Q. 51:4	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*muqassimāt*	storm, clouds
Q. 51:7	*wa*=S(Gen)+*dhāt* consS	*samā'/ḥubuk*	cosmic phenomena
Q. 52:1	*wa*=S(Gen)	*ṭūr*	sacred locality
Q. 52:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+Part(Gen)	*kitāb masṭūr*	emblem: book
Q. 52:3	*wa*=S(Gen)+Part(Gen)	*raqq manshūr*	book
Q. 52:4	*wa*=S(Gen)+Part(Gen)	*bayt ma'mūr*	sacred locality
Q. 52:5	*wa*=S(Gen)+Part(Gen)	*saqf marfū'*	signs of creation
Q. 52:6	*wa*=S(Gen)+Part(Gen)	*baḥr masjūr*	signs of creation
Q. 53:1	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*najm*	cosmic phenomena
Q. 68:1	*wa*=S(Gen)+*wa-ma*V	*qalam*	emblem: script
Q. 74:32	*kallā wa*=S(Gen)	*qamar*	cosmic phenomenon
33	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*layl*	phases of day/night
34	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*ṣubḥ*	phases of day/night
Q. 77:1	*wa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*mursalāt*	tableau: storm/clouds

Q. 77:2	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*'āṣifāt*	storm/clouds
Q. 77:3	*wa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*nāshirāt*	
Q. 77:4	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*fāriqāt*	
Q. 77:5	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*mulqiyāt*	
Q. 79:1	*wa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*nāzi'āt*	tableau: riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 79:2	*wa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*nāshiṭāt*	riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 79:3	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*sābiḥāt*	riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 79:4	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*sābiqāt*	
Q. 85:1	*wa*=S+*dhā*-constrS	*samā'/burūj*	cosmic phenomena
Q. 85:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+Adj	*yawm maw'ūd*	Judgement Day
Q. 85:3	*wa*=S(Gen) *wa*=S(Gen)	*shāhid/mashhūd*	
Q. 86:1	*wa*=S(Gen) *wa*=S(Gen)	*samā'/ṭāriq*	cosmic phenomena
Q. 86:11	*wa*-S(Gen)+*dhāt*-consS	*samā'*	cosmic oppositions
Q. 86:12	*wa*-S(Gen)+*dhāt*-consS	*arḍ*	cosmic oppositions
Q. 89:1	*wa*=S(Gen)	*fajr*	phases of day/night;
Q. 89:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+S(Gen)	*layālī 'ashr*	phases of year;
Q. 89:3	*wa*=S(Gen)*wa*=S(Gen)	*shaf'/witr*	oppositions;
Q. 89:4	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*layl*	phases of day/night
Q. 91:1	*wa*=S(Gen)*wa*=S(Gen. suff)	*shams/ḍuḥā*	phases of day/night
Q. 91:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V(suff)	*qamar*	celestial oppositions
Q. 91:3	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V(suff)	*nahār*	phases of day/night
Q. 91:4	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V(suff)	*layl*	phases of day/night
Q. 91:5	*wa*=S(Gen)/*wa-mā*V(suff)	*samā'*	cosmic oppositions
Q. 91:6	*wa*=S(Gen)*wa-mā*V(suff)	*arḍ*	cosmic oppositions
Q. 91:7	*wa*=S(Gen)*wa-mā*V(suff)	*nafs* +/-	ethical oppositions
Q. 92:1	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*layl*	phases of day/night

(*Continued*)

Oaths of the type *wa-X* – continued

Sura	Syntactical structure[72]	Subject	Type
Q. 92:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*nahār*	cosmic oppositions
Q. 92:3	*wa=mā*V+S(Acc)/wa=S(Acc)	*dhakar/unthā*	genetic oppositions
Q. 93:1	*wa*=S(Gen)	*ḍuḥā*	phases of day/night
Q. 93:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*layl*	cosmic oppositions
Q. 95:1a	*wa*=S(Gen)	*tīn*	signs of creation
Q. 95:1b	*wa*=S(Gen)	*zaytūn*	signs of creation
Q. 95:2	*wa*=S(Gen)-constrNP	*ṭūr sinīn*	sacred localities
Q. 95:3	*wa=hādhā*-S(Gen)+Adj	*balad amīn*	sacred localities
Q. 100:1	*wa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*ʿādiyāt*	tableau: riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 100:2	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*mūriyāt*	riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 100:3	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*mughīrāt*	riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 103:1	*wa*=S(Gen)	*ʿaṣr*	phases of day/night

Oaths of the type *lā uqsimu bi-X*

Sura	Syntactical structure	Subject	Type
Q. 56:75	*fa-lā uqsimu bi*=constrS	*mawāqiʿ al-nujūm*	phases of day/night
Q. 69:38	*fa=lā uqsimu bi=mā*V	*mā tubṣirūn*	empirical vs. numinous sphere
Q. 69:39	*wa=mā lā*V	*mā lā tubṣirūn*	empirical vs. numinous sphere
Q. 70:40	*fa=lā uqsimu bi*=S-constrS *wa*=S	*rabb al-mashāriq wa'l-maghārib*	numinous sphere
Q. 75:1	*lā uqsimu bi*=S-constrS	*yawm al-qiyāma*	Judgement Day
Q. 75:2	*wa=lā uqsimu bi*=S+Adj	*nafs lawwāma*	
Q. 81:15	*fa=lā uqsimu bi*=S	*khunnas*	phases of day/night
Q. 81:16	S(Gen)+Adj	*jawārī kunnas*	phases of day/night
Q. 81:17	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*layl*	cosmic opposition

Q. 81:18	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*ṣubḥ*	cosmic opposition
Q. 84:16	*fa=lā uqsimu bi*-S	*shafaq*	threatening cosmic phenomena
Q. 84:17	*wa*=S(Gen)*wa=mā*V	*layl*	threatening cosmic phenomena
Q. 84:18	*wa*=S(Gen)*idhā*V	*qamar*	threatening cosmic phenomena
Q. 90:1	*fa=lā uqsimu bi=hādhā*-S	*balad*	sanctified localities
Q. 90:2	*wa*=S(Gen)*wa+mā*V	*wālid*	signs of creation

NOTES

1 See Ilse Lichtenstaedter, 'Das Nasīb der altarabischen Qaside', *Islamica* 5 (1932) pp. 17–96; Renate Jacobi, *Studien zur Poetik der altarabischen Qaside* (Wiesbaden, 1971).
2 See Hamori, *Medieval Arabic Literature*, pp. 3–30.
3 See Salam Al-Kindy, *Le Voyageur sans Orient: Poésie et philosophie des Arabes de l'ère préislamique* (Paris, 1998); Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.
4 See Neuwirth, *Studien* where a summary attempt at a typology of the introductory sections of the suras has been undertaken in the study on the composition of the Meccan suras.
5 This circular argument has been put forward by Julius Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin, 1961), p. 135, n. 4: 'Die wichtigsten Dokumente für den Stil der Kahine sind die ältesten Suren des Qorans [The most important documents of the style of the *kāhins* are the oldest suras]'.
6 A classification of the suras according to whether they are of earlier or later Meccan or Medinan origin was presented in chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'.
7 See the report on Qur'anic research in Neuwirth, 'Koran'; for more recent studies, see chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'.
8 The study by G. Robertson Smith ('Oaths in the Qur'ān', *Semitics* 1 [1970], pp. 126–56) presents a useful inventory of types of oaths. It remains, however, limited to mere grammatical analysis without offering any new typological insight.
9 See Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, p. 75.
10 See Manfred R. Lehmann, 'Biblical Oaths', *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 81 (1969), pp. 74–92. Lehmann's socio-linguistic study of oaths in various ancient Semitic cultures attempts a revision of the views advanced by Johannes Pedersen (*Der Eid bei den Semiten, in seinem Verhältnis zu verwandten Erscheinungen sowie die Stellung des Eides im Islam* [Strasbourg, 1914]) in his still un-superseded monograph.
11 Qur'anic oaths of this type have been collected by Smith, 'Oaths in the Qur'ān', pp. 126–35.
12 The term 'oath cluster' is the English equivalent of '*Schwurserie*' which I introduced in the *Studien* (pp. 187–8).
13 See, for example, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jārir al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Bulaq, 1323/1905; repr., Beirut, 1972); Abū'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī, *al Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* (Cairo, 1966); Abū ʿUbayda Maʿmar b. al-Muthannā al-Taymī, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Fuat Sezgin (Cairo, 1374/1954); Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Tibyān fī aqsām al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 1982). Among the English translations of the Qur'an is Bell's *Qur'ān*, which is based on extensive analytical study; his translation has been used throughout this chapter in a modified form.

Oaths of the type *wa-X* – continued

Sura	Syntactical structure[72]	Subject	Type
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Q. 93:1	*wa*=S(Gen)	*ḍuḥā*	phases of day/night
Q. 93:2	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*layl*	cosmic oppositions
Q. 95:1a	*wa*=S(Gen)	*tīn*	signs of creation
Q. 95:1b	*wa*=S(Gen)	*zaytūn*	signs of creation
Q. 95:2	*wa*=S(Gen)-constrNP	*ṭūr sinīn*	sacred localities
Q. 95:3	*wa=hādhā*-S(Gen)+Adj	*balad amīn*	sacred localities
Q. 100:1	*wa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*ʿādiyāt*	tableau: riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 100:2	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*mūriyāt*	riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 100:3	*fa*=Part(Gen)+S(Acc)	*mughīrāt*	riders performing *ghazwa*
Q. 103:1	*wa*=S(Gen)	*ʿaṣr*	phases of day/night

Oaths of the type *lā uqsimu bi-X*

Sura	Syntactical structure	Subject	Type
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Q. 69:38	*fa=lā uqsimu bi=mā*V	*mā tubṣirūn*	empirical vs. numinous sphere
Q. 69:39	*wa=mā lā*V	*mā lā tubṣirūn*	empirical vs. numinous sphere
Q. 70:40	*fa=lā uqsimu bi*=S-constrS *wa*=S	*rabb al-mashāriq wa'l-maghārib*	numinous sphere
Q. 75:1	*lā uqsimu bi*=S-constrS	*yawm al-qiyāma*	Judgement Day
Q. 75:2	*wa=lā uqsimu bi*=S+Adj	*nafs lawwāma*	
Q. 81:15	*fa=lā uqsimu bi*=S	*khunnas*	phases of day/night
Q. 81:16	S(Gen)+Adj	*jawārī kunnas*	phases of day/night
Q. 81:17	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*layl*	cosmic opposition

Q. 81:18	*wa*=S(Gen)+*idhā*V	*ṣubḥ*	cosmic opposition
Q. 84:16	*fa=lā uqsimu bi*-S	*shafaq*	threatening cosmic phenomena
Q. 84:17	*wa*=S(Gen)*wa=mā*V	*layl*	threatening cosmic phenomena
Q. 84:18	*wa*=S(Gen)*idhā*V	*qamar*	threatening cosmic phenomena
Q. 90:1	*fa=lā uqsimu bi=hādhā*-S	*balad*	sanctified localities
Q. 90:2	*wa*=S(Gen)*wa+mā*V	*wālid*	signs of creation

NOTES

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14 Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, resumed in Nöldeke *et al., Die Geschichte des Korantextes.*
15 The sense of these passages still remains uncertain for some modern scholars. See W. Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh, 1970), pp. 77–9 following Bell's commentary, *Qur'ān*, II, p. 78: 'It may be doubted, however, whether those who first heard Muhammad recite these passages attached any definite meaning to the asseverations. If there was one unequivocal interpretation, it would seem to have been forgotten by later Muslims.'
16 For an analysis of the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran: Band I*, pp. 167–77.
17 This has been altered. Bell's translation: *In the midst of which they (move) as a body* should be replaced with the common version. Bell's version also fails to translate the climax given in the last verse of the oath passage, so I have added the adverb 'finally' at the risk of overstressing the dynamic aspect.
18 All Qur'anic translations in this chapter have been taken from Bell, *The Qur'ān*.
19 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya stresses the Qur'anic use of the particle *fa-* in order to prevent the passage from being interpreted as referring to more than one group of agents; see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tibyān*, p. 78.
20 Ibid., pp. 77–9.
21 This was noticed by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tibyān*, p. 77.
22 For an analysis of the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran: Band I*, pp. 394–414.
23 Q. 79:1–5 has been modified here. Bell's translation reads: *Drawing full stretch/Hustling and bustling,/Toiling and moiling,/Striving to be foremost,/Managing affairs.*
24 Bell, *Qur'ān*, II, p. 633.
25 Descriptions of angels elsewhere in the Qur'an differ substantially from the description appearing in Q. 79:1–5; see, for example, the introductory sections of *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* and *Sūrat Fāṭir* (Q. 35). What might be taken as suggestive of angels in *Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt* is the 'scaring shout' on Judgement Day, mentioned in Q. 79:13; this act of shouting is sometimes attributed to the angels as one of their tasks as guardians (see, e.g., Q. 37:2). However, the commentators who interpret the oath cluster as referring to angels have the later Qur'anic concept of the angels of death in mind. Yet, if Q. 79:1 is taken to mean the angels' plucking the souls of men from their bodies, then their most serious function is mentioned at the beginning, and thus no proper role remains for the act undertaken in Q. 79:5, which is supposed to present the climax of the series of motions. In any case, such an interpretation would imply a grave anachronism since angels are not present in the early suras. For the later-inserted references to angels in *Sūrat al-Qadr*, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 95–105; and in *Sūrat al-Ma'ārij*, ibid., pp. 431–51.
26 For *nashaṭa*, *sabaḥa* and *sabaqa* (all fitting characterisations for horses), see Edward William Lane and Stanley Lane-Poole, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut, 1968). For *naza'a*, see Zamakhsharī's (*Kashshāf*) paraphrase of the oath cluster based on the interpretation that it depicts a raid; he offers this interpretation as one of several alternatives.
27 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 498–520.
28 Q. 77:2–5 has been modified here. Bell's translation reads: *And those that come with hurricane blast,/By those that scatter abroad,/And those that divide asunder,/And those that drop reminders.*
29 See Bell, *Qur'ān*, II, p. 626, n. 1.
30 Compare Q. 55:6, Q. 22:18, Q. 13:15, Q. 16:49, Q. 38:18, Q. 21:79, Q. 34:10.
31 The continuity of the refrain is stressed by Maḥmūd b. Hamza b. Naṣr al-Kirmānī, *Asrār al-tikrār fī'l-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā' (Cairo, 1974), I, p. 212.
32 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 523–48.
33 Q. 51:2–4 has been modified here. Bell's translation reads: *And those that bear burdens,/And those that run lightly,/And those that distribute.*

34 The rising-places (*al-mashāriq*) should be understood as denoting particular phases of the day; the verse should then be translated as 'Lord of the heavens and the earth and of what is between them, and Lord of sunrise and sunset'. For further instances of the nouns in the plural/dual form used in a non-literal sense, see Neuwirth, 'Symmetrie', and eadem, 'Qur'ānic Readings of the Psalms'.
35 The *fa-* participle in this section no longer denotes progression in the motion of the agents, but rather progression in the apprehension of the listener.
36 See Wellhausen, *Reste*, p. 137.
37 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 217–26.
38 Q. 95:1 has been divided into two here, as *wa'l-tīn wa'l-zaytūn* should be understood as two verses so that they balance the pair of topographic evocations in Q. 90:2–3; see Neuwirth, *Studien*, p. 33.
39 Bell's 'land' has been replaced here with 'town', which is clearly intended. (The same has been done, later, in Q. 90:1–2 as well.)
40 See chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
41 While *tīn* is a *hapax legomenon* (i.e. it is a word appearing only once in the Qur'an), *zaytūn* appears four times in a literal sense to denote a kind of divinely granted fruit-bearing vegetation in Q. 6:99 and 141, Q. 16:11 and Q. 80:29; and once in a distinctly symbolic context in Q. 24:35 and again, implicitly, in Q. 23:20 where it even appears as having originated in Mount Sinai.
42 For an interpretation of the sura, see, Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 236–52.
43 Bell translates this as 'land'. The intended meaning, however, is an urban settlement – Mecca to be precise – as was the case in *Sūrat al-Tīn*; see the discussion of *Sūrat al-Balad* in chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
44 For a commentary on the entire sura see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 685–709; see also the discussion in chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
45 On the *taḥaddī* (challenge) verses, see chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
46 It is worth noting that the allusions to the particularly close relationship between the pious believer and God, so characteristic of the type of suras under discussion here, are found in no more than four instances in the rest of the early Meccan suras: Q. 94:7–8; Q. 96:19; Q. 74:55; Q. 73:19. They all occur in the closing section of their respective suras and exhort the performance of liturgical service:

i) Q. 94:7–8: *So when thou art free, labour,/And towards thy Lord set thy desire. Sūrat al-Sharḥ* is a short sura which is closely related to *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā*. However, the former sura slightly differs from the latter mainly in that it is missing an introductory oath cluster. *Sūrat al Sharḥ* consists of a statement reflecting the Prophet's arrival at a new level of consciousness. This sura may have been the first communicated by Muhammad; see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I.
ii) Q. 96:19: *Nay, obey him not, but do obeisance and draw near. Sūrat al-'Alaq* begins with an exhortation to recite; it appears in traditions detailing the first revelation received by Muhammad; see Uri Rubin, *'Iqra' bi-smi rabbika . . . !* Some Notes on the Interpretation of *Sūrat al-'Alaq*, vs. 1–5', *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), pp. 213–30. As will be shown, the oath clusters referring to particular phases of the day bear an intrinsic relation to recitation; the sura is therefore loosely related to the type under discussion. The same applies to the passages in Q. 74:55: *. . . And he who wills remembers it* (Q. 74:56 being a later addition) and Q. 73:19: *. . . Lo, this is a reminder, and he who wills, chooses to his Lord a way* (Q. 73:20 is a later addition). Both suras, very similar in composition, start with an exhortation – either explicit (*Sūrat al-Muzzammil*, Q. 73) or implicit (*Sūrat al-Muddaththir*, Q. 74) – to recite the Qur'an during the night. Notably, the rest of the shorter Meccan suras treat various topics, in their closing sections, that do not have any bearing on recitation. The longer Meccan suras, on the other hand, follow fixed patterns

of composition in which the topic of the affirmation of the genuineness of the Qur'anic revelation always appears in the closing section; see Neuwirth, *Studien*, p. 200.

47 *ibtighā' wajh al-rabb* – 'desire for the countenance of his Lord'; *ni'mat al-rabb* – 'goodness of the Lord'; *dhikr li'l-'ālamīn* – 'a reminder for the worlds'.

48 *rāḍī* – 'content'; *marḍī* – 'contented'; *muṭma'inn* – 'confident'; *mustaqīm* –'straight'.

49 For an analysis of the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 347–58.

50 For more on this liturgical development, see chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

51 For a commentary on the entire sura, which has been identified as a very early Qur'anic communication, second only to *Sūrat al-Sharḥ*, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 77–95.

52 Uri Rubin, 'Morning and Evening Prayers in Early Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987), pp. 40–67. The study is based on extensive evidence from Hadith literature treating the three prayers at *fajr*, *ḍuḥā* and *'aṣr*. Rubin traces their development without, however, using the isolated Qur'anic testimonies to try to discern the historical succession of each type of prayer or the value placed upon them by the community at those times. Rubin concludes that the ancient Arabian *ḍuḥā* prayer was substituted with the *ṣalāt al-fajr* adopted from Jewish practice, but the present investigation of the Qur'anic testimonies does not support that theory. On the basis of the Qur'anic evidence it appears that, at least in the early Meccan period, both times of prayer – *fajr* and *ḍuḥā* – were equally esteemed. See chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

53 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 291–309.

54 Concerning the critical evaluation of the traditional sources that refer to Muhammad's revelation, see Meir Jacob Kister, '*Al-taḥannuth*: An Inquiry into the Meaning of a Term', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 31 (1968), pp. 223–36; Rudolf Sellheim, 'Muhammeds erstes Offenbarungserlebnis: Zum Problem mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung im 1./7. und 2./8. Jahrhundert', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987), pp. 1–16.

55 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 226–36.

56 For an analysis of the entire sura, see ibid., pp. 217–26.

57 The translation has been amended so that the oaths are arranged in pairs. The cluster thus consists of three pairs rather than six single oaths.

58 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran Band I*, pp. 199–216.

59 The Islamic context of the ten nights is discussed in Wellhausen, *Reste*, p. 81. Regarding the importance of the first decade of the month of fasting and the month of pilgrimage respectively, see Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran*.

60 See the tradition quoted by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (*Tibyān*, p. 28) and slightly modified by Muḥammad b 'Alī Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-Ḥajj wa asrārih*, ed. Ḥusnī Naṣr Zaydān (Cairo, 1969), p. 58.

61 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tibyān*, pp. 28–30.

62 This verse and the preceding oath cluster as a whole have caused misunderstanding among some researchers. For instance, Bell's inaccurate statement (*Qur'ān*, II, p. 655) that 'The series of asseverations at the beginning is not very intelligible, or well arranged, and does not lead up to any important statement. It almost looks like the holding up to ridicule or some parody of Muḥammad's style', has not been corrected by Watt (*Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, p. 79).

63 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya stresses the dialectic relationship between the possibility of salvation offered in the oath cluster and the heedless rejection of it by the *umam khāliya*; see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Tibyān*, p. 28.

64 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 321–9.

65 For an explanation of this interpretation, see ibid., p. 325.

66 The oath cluster situated in the middle of *Sūrat al-Muddaththir* referring to the breakthrough of light at the end of the night (Q. 74:32–4) and the statement containing an eschatological

threat followed by a deliberation on the enhanced responsibility of man (Q. 74:35–7) may be viewed as parallels to the introductory section of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq*.

67 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 330–44.

68 The complex composition of this sura has been analysed in Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 222–3.

69 In Q. 69:38–9, an oath is sworn upon a subject that is intangible: *I swear by what ye see,/And what ye do not see.*

70 See in particular Q. 86:1–3.

71 See Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

72 The syntactical structure followed in these tables was taken from Neuwirth, *Studien*.

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53 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 291–309.
54 Concerning the critical evaluation of the traditional sources that refer to Muhammad's revelation, see Meir Jacob Kister, '*Al-taḥannuth*: An Inquiry into the Meaning of a Term', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 31 (1968), pp. 223–36; Rudolf Sellheim, 'Muhammeds erstes Offenbarungserlebnis: Zum Problem mündlicher und schriftlicher Überlieferung im 1./7. und 2./8. Jahrhundert', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987), pp. 1–16.
55 For a commentary on the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 226–36.
56 For an analysis of the entire sura, see ibid., pp. 217–26.
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70 See in particular Q. 86:1–3.
71 See Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.
72 The syntactical structure followed in these tables was taken from Neuwirth, *Studien*.

SECTION II

The Liturgical Qur'an and the Emergence of the Community

5

From Recitation through Liturgy to Canon: Sura Composition and Dissolution during the Development of Islamic Ritual*

The Relationship between Canon and Ritual

In view of the fact that the creation of the Qur'an's scriptural corpus was completed within a singularly short space of time, and the authoritative codification and dissemination of the entire text (justly identified by Schoeler as its publication[1]) followed just as swiftly,[2] it is easy to lose sight of a second, parallel process: the emergence of an oral canon which was tangible within live recitation and whose *Sitz im Leben* was the community's service, the ritual – which was perhaps spontaneous initially but later formally organised and finally obligatory – with its central prayer rite, the *ṣalāt*. It seems worth underscoring that we are not only confronted here with the emergence of two modes of publication, but, indeed, with two spheres of Qur'anic impact that were later to grow into two distinct institutions, namely, teaching and ritual. The question of the relation or interaction between scripture and ritual during their individual stages of development until their respective codification or institutionalisation has been touched upon sporadically in scholarship.[3] However, there is at present no historical study of Islamic worship along the lines of Ismar Elbogen's standard opus for Jewish ritual, and none seems to be forthcoming.[4]

Yet, it is worth attempting to examine the Qur'an itself for reflections of an interaction between scripture and ritual. This requires a two-pronged approach: the study of the ritual practices documented in the Qur'an, with reference to the status they are allocated there, and the examination of those

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon: Zu Entstehung und Wiederauflösung der Surenkomposition im Verlauf der Entwicklung eines islamischen Kultus', in Stefan Wild, ed., *The Qur'an as Text* (Leiden, Brill, 1996), pp. 69–106. Reprinted by kind permission of the publisher. Translation of the original provided by Gwendolin Goldbloom.

suras, or parts of suras, that are recognisable as units intended for recitation within a ritual setting.[5] In view of the prevailing uncertainties in the periodisation of the Qur'an and the lack of research on the Medinan suras, however, our present examination will be cursory and not go beyond a preliminary sketch.

The thesis, presupposed in our study, that there was a concurrent and interrelated development of ritual and canon in the earliest days of Islam may appear little suggestive to an observer who has the eventually established relation between ritual and canon in mind. Looking at the functions (which still obtain today) assigned to the Qur'an and *ṣalāt* (i.e. the mandatory, Islamic service) by the Sunna in Islamic tradition, one gains the impression of an interaction that may be intensive in places but that on the whole is limited. It is true that the Qur'an holds a prominent position in the *ṣalāt* service: the daily prayer, and consequently the last part of the Friday services, includes the recitation of short Qur'anic passages in diverse places; the sermon, too, makes use of individual Qur'anic verses. Still, the services do not appear to be centred around scriptural readings; rather, ritual concerns are given the priority. Prayer services have always been scheduled around certain times of day (i.e. their orientation is cosmic) and they also presuppose several preliminary ritual preparations, some of which are described in the Qur'an.[6] Furthermore, for most of their duration, they require that prescribed physical positions be strictly adhered to,[7] thereby leaving no doubt as to their substantially ritual character. Even where Qur'an recitation is obligatory – in the mostly short *qirā'a* (text readings) at the beginning of the first and second sequence of ritual gestures (*rak'a*) – the source is generally a limited section of the Qur'an. The situation is the same in the Friday service which includes the prayer ritual at the end and does not involve a more extensive Qur'anic recitation elsewhere. Thus, in official worship the Qur'an is represented either by its shorter suras or by short excerpts from them; more extended forms of the Qur'an are not used as liturgical units in the official cult.

Consequently, the recitation of the Qur'an in its intact form occurs, rather, on occasions of private piety, such as during Ramadan when the Qur'an is recited in its entirety based on the division of the text into thirty equal parts for every day of the month. Other private liturgical occasions are the diverse rites of passage, such as circumcision and obsequies for the dead, for none of which recitation is prescribed in the Qur'an itself. As for the longer suras, one may hear them recited in their entirety in private houses or at cemeteries but not as part of the rituals which have always included Qur'anic recitation as an obligatory element, such as the mandatory prayer or the Friday communal service as noted earlier.

That the circumstances described are the final point of a development will become apparent once we look at those complex suras which, on the basis of formal criteria, can be proven with some plausibility to have been intended as self-contained units of recitation. These suras largely belong to the middle and late Meccan periods according to Nöldeke's chronology;[8] they thus for a long time proved formative for the shape of the sura, until finally giving way to either a simple, monothematic structure or a long sura no longer displaying a clearly structured composition. The structure of the complex middle and late Meccan suras – characterised by narrative passages framed by strongly formulaic introductory and concluding passages – seems to indicate that the entire text would have been recited in a single public setting. The public recitation of such a complex text sequence in its entirety, which would have been the norm during the Meccan period of the Prophet's ministry, was no longer the prevailing practice in the Medinan period.

It is hardly necessary to emphasise that under these conditions, which do not allow for the recitation of longer units of meaning, there are no prescribed pericopes for use in the Friday service or during feasts that allow for the presentation of theologically indispensible passages from scripture. What formed the actual backbone of ritual in the two older religions, Judaism and Christianity, in Late Antiquity (and continues to do so today) – the remembrance of the foundational events of salvation history condensed into a cycle of scriptural reading extending over the course of a year – has no equivalent in Islam. In Judaism, this scripturally aided remembrance is intensified by accompanying prayer formularies and hymns which together serve to conjure up the great drama of Israel's history with God: the election of the Israelites as God's chosen people, their exodus, their settling down in the Promised Land, their exile and the anticipation of the Messiah.[9] In Christianity, the commemoration celebrated in the reading of the scripture culminates in the Eucharist, epitomising the two great stages of Christ's ministry and his redemptive sacrifice.[10] These forms of commemoration have no equivalent in the Islamic cult. No Friday service recalls those Qur'anic passages of inner-Islamic salvation history that could be considered milestones in the foundation of the new religion, such as Muhammad's visions, his nocturnal journey to the Masjid al-Aqṣā (i.e. the Jerusalem Temple), his *hijra*, the community's miraculous escape from the overwhelming might of the enemy in the battle of Badr, or their renewal of the pilgrimage ritual. There are no parts of the Friday service charged with the revival of individual phases of inner-Islamic, let alone pre-Islamic, salvation history.

Thus, there are two remarkable peculiarities awaiting explanation. First, the absence in formal worship – that is, during the *ṣalāt* ritual as well as the Friday

service – of institutionalised recollections of salvation history throughout the year and, second, the departure from the original type of sura whose structure had been that of a complex liturgical unit that included a narration. As will be shown, the two phenomena are related to each other. They will receive special attention in the following attempt at a brief synopsis of the developments of the canon and ritual.

The Development of Islamic Liturgy; Canon and Worship – the Early Meccan Suras

To begin our synopsis, let us first turn to the oldest suras, that is, to those simple structures which – mainly falling into Nöldeke's early Meccan period – do not yet introduce the prophetic narrative that was to become so central later on.[11] We will examine these suras for evidence of the social setting in which they were recited and we will simultaneously pursue the existing traces of those basic cultic orientations that may have been shared by the proclaimer, addressed in the second person singular ('thou'), and his listeners.[12] It is only by having a rough idea of the initially shared identity of those who heard the Qur'anic recitation in the early Meccan period that it will be possible to discern the momentous change that was later to distinguish the proto-Muslim identity from the pre-Islamic, pagan identity.[13] The early suras, and the argument unfolding within them, offer a solid foundation for this. Did the proclaimer prepare his message in advance, that is, did he promulgate it in private missionary activity using a free sermon style before presenting it officially to a broader audience in the form of the suras? Or, did he recite it for the first time in the unmistakeably ceremonially stylised form reflected in the early suras of the Qur'an?[14] If we assume the latter – that the recitation was not a secondary, official performance but the initial act by which various ideas were communicated – then it follows that the persons addressed and/or referred to in the text were a group of Muhammad's present/absent listeners, and the platform of the public debate described in the suras was the setting in which the texts were liturgically recited. Are there any foundational ideas shared by the speaker and his listeners that could have united them as a group with a common identity? Roughly following the approach of Assmann, who coined the phrase 'cultural memory' as an abbreviation of the complex interaction of cultural identity and reference to the past, we will first discuss the question of the significant space recognisable in the suras. Assmann makes a link between the cultural memory and topography:

> *Significantly, place ... plays the main role in collective and cultural mnemotechnics – the culture of memory. The art of memory works with*

> *imaginary settings, and memory culture with signs based on Nature. Even, or indeed especially, entire landscapes may serve as a medium for cultural memory.* These are not so much accentuated *by* signs ('monuments') as raised to the status *of* signs, that is, they are *semioticized* ... These are topographical 'texts' of the cultural memory, they are 'mnemotopes'.[15]

Mecca and the Kaaba as spatial mnemotopes

Ritual instructions

It is hardly surprising that Mecca and its *Ḥaram* (sanctuary), the Kaaba, are the central mnemotopes (i.e. the recurring emblems of identity) of the early Meccan suras. They provide an insight into the cultural practices of a group of people in a particular place and at a specific time. Mecca is clearly dominant among the places mentioned in the thirty-two suras that can be typologically classified as early. Apart from two narrative recollections of history, *Sūrat al-Fīl* (Q. 105) and *Sūrat Quraysh* (Q. 106), which are reminders of God's defence of the sanctuary against military aggression and of the origins of the economic privileges of the Quraysh, respectively, the Qur'an acknowledges Mecca as a symbolic space, the space of a theophany; its only equivalent being Mount Sinai. It is with this sacred connotation that Mecca is invoked in the introductory oaths in some of the early Meccan suras.[16] We find it referred to with this significance twice: once in the deictic expression [*by*] *this* [*town*] *secure!* (*wa hadha'l-balad al-amīn*, Q. 95:3) and again in the expression [*by*] *the House* [*visited by pilgrims*] (*wa'l-bayt al-maʿmūr*, Q. 52:4). In some cases, it is closely linked to Sinai as the foundational place of a cult. Mecca in these instances is not, as we can see, introduced by its actual toponym but by a cultic circumlocution: as a settlement attached to a *Ḥaram* and a pilgrimage site. In a third introductory oath, [*Verily,*] *I swear by this* [*town*] (*lā uqsimu bi-hādhā'l-balad*, Q. 90:1), a similarly encoded reference to Mecca appears which sets it as the heart of social and cultural life.[17]

At the same time, the *Ḥaram* in Mecca is presented as the actual stage for social interaction, particularly for the rituals performed there. Instructions to the speaker concerning worship name them, such as the prayer and sacrifice referred to in Q. 108:2: *so pray unto thy Lord and sacrifice* (*fa-ṣalli li-rabbika wa'nḥar*); the natural place of the sacrifice was by the Kaaba.[18] In Q. 96:19, there is a reference to the *sajda* (prostration), which is part of the *ṣalāt* ritual: *and bow thyself, and draw nigh* (*wa'sjud wa'qtarib*). At the end of the early Meccan suras, there are usually instructions to the transmitter to perform a similar practice, ritual recitation: *and as for thy Lord's blessing, declare it* (*wa-ammā bi-niʿmati rabbika fa-ḥaddith*, Q. 93:11); *Then remind them! Thou art*

only a reminder (*fa-dhakkir innamā anta mudhakkir*, Q. 88:21); *Then magnify the Name of thy Lord, the All-mighty* (*fa-sabbiḥ bi'smi rabbika'l-ʿazīm*, Q. 56:96); *And proclaim the praise of thy Lord when thou arisest,/and proclaim the praise of thy Lord in the night, and at the declining of the stars* (*wa sabbiḥ bi-ḥamdi rabbika ḥīna taqūm; wa mina'l-layli fa-sabbiḥhu wa idbāra'l-nujūm*, Q. 52:48–9). Similar instructions in other early Meccan suras occur at the beginning only: *Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created* (*iqra' bi'smi rabbika'lladhī khalaq*, Q. 96:1); *Magnify the Name of thy Lord the Most High* (*sabbiḥi'sma rabbika'l-aʿlā*, Q. 87:1); *arise, and warn!/Thy Lord magnify* (*qum fa-andhir; wa rabbaka fa-kabbir*, Q. 74:2–3); *keep vigil the night, except a little* (*qumi'l-layla illā qalīlā*, Q. 73:2); *and chant the Qur'an very distinctly* (*wa rattili'l-qur'āna tartīlā*, Q. 73:4).[19] In Q. 87:14–5: *Prosperous is he who has cleansed himself,/and mentions the Name of his Lord, and prays* (*qad aflaḥa man tazakkā; wa dhakkara'sma rabbihi fa-ṣallā*), the brief catalogue of virtues calling for *ṣalāt* and hymnic recitation proves that the recitation is closely connected to the *ṣalāt* ritual. This is confirmed by the instruction *So bow yourselves before God, and serve Him!* (*fa-sjudū li'llāhi wa-ʿbudū*, Q. 53:62), which is expressed in the context of a reference to the recitation of the Qur'an, *Do you then marvel at this discourse* (*a-fa-min hādhā'l-ḥadīthi taʿjabūn*, Q. 53:59). It is obvious that the two are closely related: recitation, whether performed or heard, and the *ṣalāt* ritual.

Criticising the behaviour of those present at the ritual

Much more frequently, however, in the early Meccan suras there are criticisms pertaining to the performance of ritual, presumably of the existing Kaaba rites, since opponents of the messenger are featured. There is criticism of those who lack gravity, *So woe to those that pray/and are heedless of their prayers* (*fa-waylun li'l-muṣallīn; alladhīna hum ʿan ṣalātihim sāhūn*, Q. 107:4–5); of those who prevent dependent (or less privileged) persons from taking part in the ritual, *What thinkest thou? He who forbids/a servant when he prays* (*a-ra'ayta'l-lladhī yanhā; ʿabdan idhā ṣallā*, Q. 96:9–10); and of those who reject the entire ritual (in a retrospective), *They shall say, 'We were not of those who prayed . . .'* (*qālū lam naku mina'l-muṣallīn*, Q. 74:43) and *For he confirmed it not, and did not pray* (*fa-lā ṣaddaqa wa-lā ṣallā*, Q. 75:31). In the context of the *ṣalāt*, there are also criticisms of those listening to a recitation who refuse to assume the position of humility, *When it is said to them, 'Prostrate yourselves!' they prostrate not* (*wa-idhā qīla lahumu'rkaʿū lā yarkaʿūn*, Q. 77:48); of those who deny the recitation is the word of God *those who cry it lies!/In what discourse after this will they believe?* (*fa-bi-ayyi ḥadīthin baʿdahu yu'minūn*, Q. 77:49–50); and of those who show disrespect by laughing instead of appropriately

weeping, *Do you then marvel at this discourse,/and do you laugh, and do you not weep* (*a-fa min hādhā'l-ḥadīthi taʿjabūn; wa taḍḥakūna wa-lā tabkūn*, Q. 53:59–60). The *ṣalāt* ritual that appears, in some of these instances, to be linked to the recitation of the proclaimer is never differentiated from the ritual referred to in Q. 107:4 and Q. 108:2 which, in view of its existence before the onset of the revelations, should be regarded as clearly ancient Arabian.[20]

The existing form of the *ṣalāt* ritual – containing the sequence of ritual gestures (*rakʿa*): bowing down (*rukūʿ*), prostration (*sajda*) and standing upright (*qiyām*) – must be seen as the frame for the recitations. The reference to it exclusively at the beginning or the end of the sura may even indicate that the ritual had an introductory or concluding function in the verbal service which was developing in tandem with the recitation. It is noteworthy that the transmitter finds his opponents mainly among the ritually negligent Meccans, the same persons whom he himself finds lacking in expressions of piousness towards his own contribution to divine service, the *qur'ān*, and that his followers who perform the service with him and listen to his recitation are subjected to derision by the same opponents (Q. 83:29). All these interactions seem to indicate that at one point there was a cult community, probably by the Kaaba, comprising the proclaimer and his Meccan compatriots.[21]

Mecca and the Kaaba as temporal mnemotopes

Liturgically sacred times as indications of a shared symbolic horizon

The parts of early Meccan suras emphasised by oaths in particular confirm that Mecca and the Kaaba are also temporal mnemotopes. This is not surprising, for as Assmann says:

> memory figures need to be given substance through a particular setting and to be realized in a particular time. In other words, they are always related concretely to time and place, even if this is not necessarily in an historical or a geographical sense. Collective memory's reliance on this concrete orientation creates points of crystallization. The substance of memories is connected to time both through the adherence to primal or outstanding events and through the periodic rhythms to which these memories refer. For instance, the calendar of festivals mirrors a collectively 'experienced time' that may be secular or ecclesiastical, agricultural or military, depending on the nature of the group.[22]

The sequence of the times of day (being structured by sacred times reserved for divine service) is the microstructure corresponding to the macrostructural

calendar of holidays. Very early on, we come across some of the times of day that would be fixed as times for prayer much later; they occur in emphatic style in the context of oaths. The times of day and night obviously possess sufficient weight to fulfil the symbolic function of oaths, as seen for example in the reference to *fajr* in Q. 89:1, Q. 74:33, Q. 52:48; *ḍuḥā* in Q. 93:1, Q. 91:3;[23] and to a holiday period in the hallowed decade of the *ayyām ʿashr* (the ten days) in Q. 93:2.[24] By means of this emphatic invocation of the times of day, it is possible to draw on a store of signs shared by the transmitter and his listeners, signs indicating the cosmically determined times relevant for the rites presumed to have taken place by the Kaaba.

The times of the new service and their part in the times of day prescribed by ritual

What becomes customary in the more complex suras – the assignment of ritual acts of divine service directly to particular sacred times – is already foreshadowed in the early Meccan suras; thus, Q. 52:48 gives the instruction to perform prayer at sunrise. Suras emphatically introduced by oaths referring to the times of day, however, must be considered as being even more indicative of the religious relevance that the times of day possessed for the listeners.[25] Insofar as the suras introduced in this way have as their topic the ritual acts of divine service, in particular recitation,[26] the oath verses bear a double significance: they refer to the act of the *ṣalāt* ritual and also the cosmically determined time for recitation.

All this suggests that though the proclaimer probably undertook vigils for some time in solitude, in anticipation of receiving a revelation,[27] he also repeatedly performed recitations in the public setting of Meccan worship at particular times of day.[28] On revisiting the early suras while bearing this in mind, their ancient Arabian elements no longer appear stylistically surprising. The introductory oaths' continuation of the *kāhin* style of oration, or the stereotypical *idhā* series of the eschatological introductions,[29] indeed, the entire *saj'* ductus with its short constituents, are based on the repetition of the same formal elements in the same position. The suras, which are equally reliant on repetition, may be understood as the translation of the ritual performance into linguistic expression. It is in light of their close association with the Kaaba rites – attested from the very beginning – that the unique form of the early Meccan suras must be understood. This aspect may equally provide an explanation for why these suras, and only these suras, constitute a partial corpus reserved for the *ṣalāt* ritual to this very day.

Synopsis of the Development of Ritual and Canon: The Later Meccan Suras

If we accept that there is a relationship between the *Ḥaram* ritual and the particular form of the earliest suras, then the change in the form of the later Meccan suras – which are longer and more complex in structure – indicates that there must have been some new development in the ritual at this time. Our investigation will now turn away from the shorter suras of the early Meccan period and focus on those compositions of the later period which adopted a narrative from the past as their new, central topic. In the present context we will refer to these complex suras simply as 'history suras'.

Scripture as mnemotope

If we were to look for the central figures of memory in the later Meccan suras, and examine them for clues about their anchorage in time and place, on the one hand, and for internal indications of the circumstances and setting of the recitation, on the other, we would come up with a very different picture from the one uncovered for the shorter, early Meccan suras. Instead of emphatic references to the time and place of certain rites found at the beginning of the early suras and at their distinctively formulaic conclusion, we find at the start of the longer suras the explicit naming of the scripture (*kitāb*) and, more rarely, reference to the recitation (*qur'ān*).[30] Only five of the twenty-two history suras begin with a subject either unrelated or only indirectly related to scripture.[31] Looking at the form, there are only five instances of introductory oaths in suras of this type.[32] These oaths appear in a new guise: rather than swearing by the time and place of certain rituals, they swear by the scripture. Oaths in these suras start to be replaced with a solemn deictic expression – soon to become the norm – which begins with a demonstrative *This is the* [*Scripture*] (*dhālika'l-kitāb*) . . .,[33] or a nominal phrase made up of one single word: [*It is*] *a* [*Scripture*] (*kitābun*) . . .;[34] these would remain the usual introductions until the end of the Qur'an's proclamation.

Reflections on the formation of ritual and canon: The emergence of liturgies and scriptural pericopes

Since, at this time, there was no corpus of written Qur'anic texts for the later Meccan suras to draw upon, the frequent use of the term scripture in those suras most likely refers to an entity beyond a concrete book. This entity may be taken to be the heavenly scripture that was made available for recitation (*qur'ān*) and remembrance (*dhikr*) (Q. 19:2, Q. 19:51), and from which texts were now being proclaimed intermittently.[35] According to the middle and

later Meccan suras, the receipt of scripture was a distinction that had already been bestowed on earlier messengers from the Jewish and Christian traditions; however, the proclaimer does not have knowledge of these texts from books, but from oral communications. Thus, the link between the various participants in scriptural heritage was not the identity of the diverse scriptural corpora but the awareness that there exists in the transcendental realm a finite 'canonical corpus', a text henceforth unalterable, which only requires that it be sent down, proclaimed, arranged into a suitable form for divine service and subsequently subjected to exegesis to make it accessible to mankind. The fact that the text in its entirety was not at the disposal of the proclaimer, but was only conveyed to him as fragmentary recollections does not contradict this. In view of the fact that it was the first time that the scriptural text was being conveyed in Arabic, its segmentation into pericopes could appear to have been a legitimate process since the presentation of scripture in the form of pericopes was common in the Jewish and Christian communities.[36] The resulting pericope from the heavenly book, constituting the *dhikr* – made up predominantly of recollections of history – is framed by affirmations of the revelation as well as by hymnic and polemic passages.[37] This particular structure thus created for the liturgical performance can be seen as a recapitulation of the Jewish or Christian liturgy, at the heart of which is the recollection of salvation history. It is remarkable that the later Meccan suras explicitly state that the prophetic histories and individual Biblical parables stem from *a Manifest Book* [i.e. *scripture*] (*kitāb mubīn*, e.g. Q. 11:6 and elsewhere) while other topoi, such as the polemical questioning of the revelation, are presented in the form of commentaries, for example, *They also say . . . Say* (*qālū . . . qul . . .*, Q. 6:37 and elsewhere). Thus, the ascription 'divine origin' is not always equivalent to 'excerpt from the heavenly scripture'. As the etymology suggests – *qur'ān* being the Arabic equivalent of the Syriac word *qeryānā*, meaning not only 'reading' but also 'lectionary', 'pericope' – the Qur'an does, in the end, emerge as a book of pericopes providing texts for ritual recitation. Yet, throughout the development of the corpus, the text does not attain such a status: the individual units of recitation – the suras – were still in the process of constituting themselves from the pericopes that originated in the celestial scripture and from the texts of diverse liturgical genres which framed them.[38]

Change in the form of suras and the introduction of mnemonic devices

The scripture mnemotope induced an expansion of collective consciousness in the later Meccan period that can hardly be overestimated. Firstly, the topography of scriptural history has been extended beyond Mecca to include the homeland of earlier messengers; thus, the Holy Land emerges as a

particularly blessed region.[39] Secondly, the temporal setting of the message has been extended into faraway times. That the community counted themselves among those who had received a scripture that told about their forebears and had been continuously conveyed in batches was a momentous step, for it ultimately meant that they had adopted the cultural memory of a different group;[40] they had embraced aspects of a different tradition and relinquished the identity they had garnered from the Meccan rites. The shift of the religious centre away from the Kaaba implies, however, not only a change of orientation in the divine service but, equally, the evolution of a new form. The considerably longer suras of this period, unlike the early Meccan suras, are no longer appropriate verbal complements to the prescribed gestures of ritual. They have outgrown their previous framework, both on a liturgical and stylistic level; their new structure suggests that they were used in a longer liturgical service – reflecting that of the older monotheistic verbal services of the Jewish and Christian religions – as does their diction, which also clearly resembles Jewish and Christian models.[41] At the same time, the inclusion of narrative passages recounting history resulted in the extension of individual verses with ever more complex syntactic structures.[42] The result was a Qur'anic verse that was no longer easy to memorise, particularly since its *clausula*, its final phrase rhyming in the stereotypical *–ūn/īn*, provided little mnemonic aid. There are multiple indications – including the introduction of the *basmala* – that, from this time onwards, new compositions were codified straightaway.[43] In fact, the more complex structure of the verses, whose endings could no longer be sufficiently marked by rhyme, seems to demand this step. This codification of suras does not reflect the actual invention of writing[44] – the technique of writing itself having been long familiar in the area – but the transition of the community from one that was based on ritual continuity to one based on textual continuity. This is primarily manifested in the intensive preoccupation with the archetype of writing, the heavenly scripture, which is assigned a status of highest authority.[45] Such a process, however, seems to indicate a pragmatic development as well, that is, the conscious transition to a more worldly technique of encapsulating memory: writing. It is writing that has now become a kind of external storage supporting memorisation.

Replacing the rhyme at the end of verses with *clausula*s of mostly stereotypical structure is not only a change of stylistic and mnemonic relevance but an indication of a change in the intended function of the Qur'anic texts. The *clausula*s at the end of verses are not merely the markers of a complex semantic and structural unit of speech, and thus a sort of aid to memorising the intended meaningful units of speech. Most of them are also metatextual statements, exhorting the remembrance of the source of the

speech, God Himself, or at least of His instructions and commandments. Consequently, every statement, even a descriptive or narrative one, turns into an appeal to reflect, a new impulse of communication. Even narratives from Qur'anic salvation history in this way become a ritual address, an appeal.[46]

It is worth noting that occasionally the texts are furnished with mnemonic aids other than *clausula*s, such as an unambiguous proportion between the numbers of verses comprising the individual parts of the suras.[47] These appear to indicate that the longer texts continued to be entrusted to a circle of listeners, qualified to practice ritual recitation, for whom the proportions may well have served as a useful mnemonic aid in the absence of the proclaimer. After all, oral tradition remained the primary way of safeguarding the text. This is reflected to this day through the practice of oral recitation, unsupported by any written document, during the *ṣalāt*.[48]

Reflections of ritual: Temporal and spatial location

It is remarkable that, despite the restructuring of the suras, the time set for the services remained unchanged. In the history suras we once again find the two times, morning and evening, in reference to the ritual; these, however, are now no longer merely symbolic objects within oath formulas but assume the character of recommended times of prayer. The ritual itself also increases in complexity: one middle Meccan sura, *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (Q. 15), confirms a new prayer formulary, the *Fātiḥa*,[49] whose use of 'we' for human speakers is a reversal of the familiar relationship between the divine speaker (who uses the 'we' voice) and the human receiver. The proclamation and promulgation of the *Fātiḥa* presupposes the existence of a new cult community.[50]

Only one text out of the whole complex of history suras, *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, still refers to the *Ḥaram* of Mecca (Q. 17:1). This is however complemented by a reference to the newly established concept of a 'distant sanctuary', the Jerusalem Temple.[51] There are indirect suggestions as well that the services were not held by the Kaaba anymore, such as the increasing exclusiveness of an audience already won over by the message. It is noteworthy that – in clear contrast to the frequent direct address employed in the short suras – the increasingly polemic passages in these later suras mostly refer to disputes already past or simulate arguments still to come. The latter arguments sometimes follow the pattern 'when they say, speak' ('*qul*');[52] it thus appears that in most of these suras, the opponents are no longer addressed directly and the disputes have become literary topoi.[53] At some point during this period, the reorientation towards the distant or the 'furthest sanctuary' in Jerusalem was implemented on the ritual level as well,[54] with the community adopting

the Jerusalem *qibla*,[55] thus sealing the expansion of the symbolic horizon into the world of the Banū Isrā'īl.

Medinan Suras

Oratory suras

To sketch the development of the later Meccan suras, which are similarly complex but of a stronger polemical character and which widely dispense with narrative,[56] would require preliminary analytical work far beyond the scope of the present study. Instead, we will look at one new type of sura that clearly follows its own formal rules. This sura, the prophetic oratory sura, belongs to the Medinan period, the time when the recollection of history so rarely found in the late Meccan suras was even rarer. Based on their composition, this small group of suras – which may well have been collected as a small, partial corpus before the final redaction – often introduced by a brief hymnal psalm paraphrase,[57] can best be understood as speeches entrusted to the Prophet. In the main they deal with one isolated subject, such as a controversial sociopolitical item, or even a topic from the privileges and signs of respect due to the Prophet's household. The proclaimer is now introduced explicitly as a prophet (*nabī*); he has attained an elevated status which is expressed in frequent references syntactically connecting him to the divine sender Himself,[58] such as *God and His messenger* (e.g. Q. 4:14 and 100, Q. 5:33).

Places of worship (*masājid*) now appear in close connection with the Prophet, in particular the *masjid al-ḥarām* in Mecca.[59] This ancient centre, which is now explicitly perceived as the point of origin of the rites performed in nascent Islam,[60] becomes the focus for the entire worship.[61] The rites of the pilgrimage are accorded late recognition as a legacy of the *masjid al-ḥarām* which, now that Abraham has been acknowledged as its founder,[62] is perceived as the natural basis of the emerging religion (which in many other aspects, however, is much more indebted to the legacy of Moses).[63] It is worth noting that the change of the *qibla*, just like its first introduction,[64] once again shows an element of the particular consideration accorded to the psychic situation of the proclaimer and, by extension, of the whole community. The suras of this type signal yet another change in form: they are typologically homogeneous, that is, they dispense with the multiple literary elements that constituted the composition commonly found in the older suras. Up to this time, the typical elements at the beginning of the suras would have been hymns, catalogues of virtues, affirmations of the revelation; in the middle parts, these would have been recollections of, or discourses on, history; and finally in the conclusion,

these would have been more affirmations of the revelation and also polemics. The new oratory suras, however, display a comparatively simple structure. The hymnal introduction is followed immediately by an exposition on the subject, still in the style of rhyming *clausula* speech; the sura only rarely entails an ornate conclusion. The Medinan sura has become a ritually stylised address to an audience; a new form achieved through comparably simple means.

The emergence of this type of sura, without any striking form of composition, at the end of the Qur'anic evolution indicates a shift of focus in the burgeoning community. Expectations no longer appear to be oriented towards finely structured liturgies. Polythematic compositions with their attendant complex discourses, often executed through different genres, are eschewed for a simpler form. The sura has grown into more of a sermon. The proclaimer has moved to stand beside the text: addressed as 'Prophet', he is now the representative charged with communicating and executing politically and socially relevant instructions. The similarity of the suras to the model of speeches containing contemporary references that later became customary as Friday sermons is obvious. It is noticeable that the history of the nascent community, though occasionally touched upon,[65] is never fully displayed in the narratives. Thus the state of affairs alluded to above, that the community in their divine service dispense not only with a general monotheistic historical recollection but with their own historical recollection as well, is foreshadowed by the Qur'anic literary development. The focus is increasingly on the proclaimer himself. The pronouncedly formulaic introduction to these suras may well indicate their recitation at the beginning of a longer ceremony which would perhaps have concluded with a prayer rite, as pithy conclusions are missing from the suras themselves.

Long suras

The movement away from elaborately composed suras reached its conclusion at the point when a mass of texts assembled in a purely accumulative way was accepted into the genre of the sura. Some of the long suras do not display any clear compositional structure;[66] despite conventional introductory passages, they seem to be collecting baskets for isolated groups of verses on various conventional sura topics and newly added law-specific expositions. It is difficult to date the collation of these individual elements into the transmitted long suras. Though we cannot exclude the possibility that their collation and emendation into the extant long suras occurred at the time of redaction, it is just as likely that they were assembled before. Some suras do display a neat composition;[67] others do not, and may have been repositories of dispersed groups of communicated verses which were no longer considered for assembly

into conventional compositions, perhaps as a consequence of a new self-perception of the community. For, at this time, the orientation towards the scripture, towards a finite corpus, was no longer seen as conditioned by the community's following in the footsteps of their spiritual forebears, the Banū Isrā'īl, but was linked more closely to the work of the contemporary Prophet himself, which had not yet crystallised into history. Now, the effective form of liturgical communication was no longer the complex sura with a recollection of salvation history at the centre but, rather, the oratory sura, the speech of the Prophet.

Concomitant with the appearance of the long sura, there arose for the first time a discrepancy between the unit of the sura and its oral performance in a ritual setting: the Medinan long sura is too long to serve a ritual function within a single service. The ritual part of the ordinary *ṣalāt* worship required the recitation of short suras or groups of verses,[68] whereas the sermon-like oratory sura proved more suitable for the liturgically framed communication of the socially and politically relevant prophetical message demanded by social exigencies. Thus, the need for a complex form of verbal service revolving around a recollection of salvation history had died away and new instructions similar to prophetic oration took its place. With this move towards a simple form, the erosion of the erstwhile subtle literary form of the sura was presaged. It became possible for worshippers at prayer to select and lift pertinent passages – pericopes – from any of the longer suras and use them for their recitations.[69] This practice may or may not date back to the time of the Prophet; however, in the form of the long sura, the Qur'an already contains within itself the formula for the dissolution of its own composition.

Conclusion

The relative simplicity of Islamic worship – of the daily *ṣalāt* as well as the Friday service – with its focus on ritual rather than the verbal expression of the worshipper has challenged scholars time and again. Shelomo [Shlomo] Dov Goitein hypothesised that this format served the needs of an audience with little knowledge of the faith that had joined the Muslim community in Medina, particularly after the wars of conquest.[70] A simple ritual would have met the needs of this audience. Eugen Mittwoch and Carl Heinrich Becker both considered the particular structure of the Friday service to be due primarily to the cultural conditions prevailing after the conquests.[71] Becker perceives clear reflections of the Christian liturgy in the Friday service while Mittwoch finds Jewish liturgical reflections instead. It may be true that the Friday service, in all the details of its final form, can only be explained by its

encounter with the cultic forms of the two older religions; however, the sermon and the *ṣalāt*, the two fundamental elements, are rooted in an intrinsically Qur'anic (in the case of the *ṣalāt*, even pre-Qur'anic) development. Thus, the crucial question remains unanswered: why is the final form of the verbal service in Islam comparably plain and not much more typologically diversified?

The development sketched earlier makes the whole problem appear even more complex. After all, what was described is a move from simpler to more complex forms, from a cult determined by ritual in the beginning to one dominated by verbal service in later Mecca which, in the end (still in the Prophet's lifetime), was once more simplified: resulting in a combination of ritual and a sermon-like oration.

Let us once more recapitulate the hypothesis presented here regarding the development of canon and ritual. The pre-Islamic *ṣalāt* rites by the Kaaba were adopted as the framework for the liturgical recitation of the Qur'an which constituted the initial stage of a verbal service. The new practice was dignified and legitimised through its performance in a particular, revered space and at specific times of day that were considered to be auspicious. The basic pattern of the rites (the fast and rhythmical repetition of gestures) became translated into linguistic forms (repetitive rhymed prose) in the early suras. Soon, however, this basic pattern of the rites was broken by the perception of the community (who were probably in communion with their still unconverted countrymen) that the new, incisive experiences they had been exposed to were not in harmony with the service performed by the Meccan *Ḥaram*. The Meccan community's growing consciousness of being estranged from their local tradition and, rather, related to the tradition of the Banū Isrā'īl, God's elect people, had opened their eyes to history; it furthermore allowed them to assimilate as their own the memory of the followers of the two older religions who were already living in a scriptural culture. The new orientation manifested itself in the genre of the history sura, which can be understood as a reflection of the Jewish and Christian verbal service in which the salvation history of the Israelites, the Banū Isrā'īl, and especially the leadership of Moses, plays an essential part. History – or the interpretation of history (in the case of the late Meccan suras which do not contain narratives) – is clearly the backbone of these suras, which were composed with a view to being recited in their entirety. Along with the awareness of scripture (and the consciousness of a stream of tradition that had incorporated the individual's experience of the divine power exerted in history) came a new concept of time. In this concept, time was linear and could be influenced by human intervention compared to the earlier notion of cyclical time that was perceived to be beyond human

influence. Perception expanded not only into times past but into the faraway space of the other recipients of scripture, whose ritual centre was even adopted as the *qibla*; thus, Jerusalem took the place of Mecca, which for the community had evolved into a space of inner exile.

Later, the more the Prophet came to occupy a position of authority alongside the text, and the more the religious practices of the new community approached the model of the older faith communities, the more urgent it became to interpret the present through sermon-like paraenesis. Historical facts, like the replacing of the ritual centre adopted from the other religions with the community's own inherited sanctuary and the readopting of the pilgrimage so significant from pre-Islamic ritual practices, indicate the erosion of the erstwhile significance of the memory of the Banū Isrā'īl. All these developments are linked to the change in orientation from a verbal service in the Jewish and Christian vein to more ritual forms of service. The emphasis on Abraham's founding of the rites endowed the emerging community with additional weight as against the piety of the Banū Isrā'īl, which had been considered exemplary in Mecca and had found expression in the complex history suras. These particular figures of memory were henceforth denied narrative exposition. The scripture would be completed, and the collation of even isolated groups of verses would be taken care of in the longer suras. However, the last phase of Qur'anic genesis was not exploited to mythologise past experience or achievement: its purpose was not to fix historical recollection, but to interpret the present through oral proclamation and to provide reassurance of divine guidance in the future. These two tenets are pursued and documented by the oratory suras.

The short *ṣalāt* suras, closely linked to the rites, had accompanied the entire process. They also shaped the post-Qur'anic notion of the pericope, the text selection apt for prayer, in spite of the changes that the concept had undergone due to the varying complexity and length of different suras. In the end, the prayer pericope came to mean a short group of verses, homogeneous in form and easy to memorise. The impetus for the original conception of the sura, which at the time of the proclaimer had been a classificatory factor for the delimitation of passages intended to become units for recitation at first,[72] and later for their written composition, had lost all its momentum. The sura retained this original significance only in the framework of Qur'anic philology: as a textual delimitation inherited from the past, useful for pragmatic purposes.

If we find the suras, in spite of all this, appearing in the final text canon as individual units clearly marked by the *basmala*, this is not, in fact, a reflection of the later prevailing practice of the liberal use of the Qur'an as a book of pericopes. On the contrary, it precisely acknowledges the claim to canonicity,

raised by the transmitted shape of the Qur'an, which had evolved long before. It is true that a continuous text transparently following the history of creation and the development of the monotheist faith did not evolve; after all, it was not a theological school that determined the conclusion of textual growth and the definitive order, but, rather, external circumstances. However, while the text units extant at the time of redaction were arranged into a corpus according to external, even mechanical criteria, it is impossible to overlook the signs of an elementary care employed to create a consummate scripture. The Qur'an is opened by a proem, the *Fātiḥa*, a text which does not fall within the genre of the sura, and it is concluded by a kind of colophon, *Sūrat al-Falaq* (Q. 113) and *Sūrat al-Nās* (Q. 114), two texts that translate into linguistic form the gesture of the raised, apotropaic hand that safeguards the text from desecration. The actual corpus, then, begins with an invocation of the scripture followed by a short catechism,[73] *That is the* [*Scripture*], *wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the God-fearing, who believe . . .* (*Dhālika'l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi – hudan li'l-muttaqīn; alladhīna yu'minūna . . .*, Q. 2:2–3); it concludes with a text which, like its model, the *Shemaʿ Yisrael*, has pressed the profession of God's unity – both as a statement and as an emphatic motto – into the most concise formula possible, *Say, he is God, One* (*Qul huwa'llāhu aḥad*, Q. 112:1).

NOTES

1 See Gregor Schoeler's significant attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the transition from an oral culture to a written culture within different fields of Muslim scholarship; Gregor Schoeler, 'Schreiben und Veröffentlichen: Zur Verwendung und Funktion der Schrift in den ersten islamischen Jahrhunderten', *Der Islam* 69 (1992), pp. 1–43; translated into English as 'Writing and Publishing: On the Use and Function of Writing in Early Islam', in Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, ed. James E. Montgomery, tr. Uwe Vagelpohl (Abingdon, 2006), pp. 62–86.

2 While 'Uthmān's authoritative codification of the consonantal text (between 53/642 and 66/655) is not historically warranted, it is plausible that there existed early written versions of the Qur'an, since there is evidence of the existence of scriptoria in the first century; see Estelle Whelan, 'Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'an', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1990), pp. 1–14. See also the testimony of activities in the field of Qur'anic philology in the second/eighth century: 'Abd Allāh b. Wahb, *al-Ǧāmiʿ: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān. Die Koranexegese*, ed. Miklos Muranyi (Wiesbaden, 1993); Cornelis [Kees] H.M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden, 1993); Hamdan, 'The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project'. For a discussion of John Burton's attempt to reconstruct the earliest redaction of the Qur'an, see Schoeler, 'Schreiben und Veröffentlichen'; Neuwirth, Review of *The Collection of the Qur'ān*.

3 See, especially, Shelomo Dov Goitein, 'Prayer in Islam', in Shelomo Dov Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 73–84; idem, 'Ramadan, the Muslim Month of Fasting: Its Early Development and Religious Meaning', in Shelomo Dov Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 90–110; Baumstark, 'Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus'.

4 Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*. So far, the two High Holidays, Ramadan and 'Id al-Fiṭr, have received some attention from a religio-sociological angle; the prayer ritual and Friday service, however, have not been further pursued.

5 This has been undertaken for the Meccan suras; see Neuwirth, *Studien*.

6 Concerning the primarily ritual character of the Islamic service, see William A. Graham, 'Islam in the Mirror of Ritual', in Richard G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis, eds., *Islam's Understanding of Itself* (Malibu, CA, 1983), pp. 53–72; Frederick M. Denny, 'Islamic Ritual: Perspectives and Theories', in Richard C. Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson, AZ, 1985), pp. 63–77. The ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) of the person praying, his ritually delimited space and his positioning of himself in the correct direction (*qibla*) are prerequisites for valid prayer.

7 It is noticeable that the majority of the later-established essential elements of prayer (*arkān al-ṣalāt*) refer to the positioning of the body rather than to articulations.

8 Concerning the structure of these suras, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 238–333.

9 Moritz Zobel emphasises the perception of the memory of salvation history that had been institutionalised within the ritual setting; see Moritz Zobel, *Das Jahr des Juden in Brauch und Liturgie* (Berlin, 1936), pp. 11–12; see also, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, WA, 1982).

10 Concerning the early theology of the Christian Sabbath, see Matthias Klinghardt, '"Auf das du den Feiertag heiligest": Sabbat und Sonntag im antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum', in Jan Assmann and Theo Sundermeier, eds., *Das Fest und das Heilige: Religiöse Kontrapunkte zur Alltagswelt* (Gütersloh, 1991), pp. 206–33.

11 With the exception of *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt* and *Sūrat al-Maʿārij*, none of the early Meccan suras contain prophetic narratives; in the middle-Meccan period, prophetic narratives are missing only in *Sūrat Qāf* (Q. 50), *Sūrat al-Mulk* (Q. 67), *Sūrat al-Jinn* (Q. 72) and *Sūrat al-Insān* (Q. 76).

12 If we do not include records from the *sīra* in our argumentation, the Qur'anic cast comprises the proclaimer (i.e. the person addressed as 'thou') and the group of individuals addressed as 'you' (plural) or 'they'. In terms of Konrad Ehlich's theory, the proclaimer appears in a spatially and temporally distended speech situation with a message formed in advance. He may also receive revelations once he has joined the group, thus appearing in a spatially, but not temporally distended speech situation; these revelations are direct replies to the reactions of the 'you'/'they' group and may well contain metatextual statements referring to revelations recited previously; see Ehlich, 'Text und sprachliches Handeln: Die Entstehung von Texten aus dem Bedürfnis nach Überlieferung', in Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann and Christof Hardmeier, eds., *Schrift und Gedächtnis: Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation* (Munich, 1983), pp. 24–44. The two possibilities of textual genesis cannot always be clearly distinguished. There has been no further study of the suras based on speech-act theory, although this is urgently required. Andreas Kellermann calls for the application of speech-act theory to the Qur'an; see Kellermann, 'Die "Mündlichkeit" des Koran: Ein forschungsgeschichtliches Problem der Arabistik', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft* 5 (1995), pp. 1–33. However, a start has been made by Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1410/1990) and by Stefan Wild, 'Die andere Seite des Textes: Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zaid und der Koran', *Die Welt des Islams* 33, no. 2 (1993), pp. 256–61.

13 Concerning the idea of ethnogenesis (i.e. the formation of ethnic groups), see Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis/Cultural Memory*; idem, *Politische Theologie zwischen Ägypten und Israel* (Munich, 1992). This idea can also be applied to the evolution of the Islamic community.

14 There is consensus within Qur'anic studies that the language employed in the early suras is ceremonially stylised.

15 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, p. 45.
16 See chapter 4, 'Images'.
17 See chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
18 Concerning the pre-Islamic rituals by the Kaaba, see the study by Uri Rubin which is based on Hadith texts; Uri Rubin, 'The *Kaʿba*: Aspects of its Ritual Functions and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986), pp. 97–131.
19 *Sūrat al-Muzzammil* is an exception here, as the instruction is obviously not to perform the recitation publicly but rather during a private vigil; see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 347–58.
20 It is not factually possible that the individuals described here as possibly rejecting the newly introduced *ṣalāt* ritual are the followers of the proclaimer. Rather, it is the spiritually and morally bankrupt rich people (Q. 107:2–3; Q. 96:9–10; Q. 92:8–9; Q. 87:11) who reject the proclaimer's message (Q. 96:13). They are the 'deniers' (*mukadhdhibūn*) of the eschatological truth (*bi'l-dīn*): Q. 107:1, Q. 96:13, Q. 83:11, Q. 82:9, Q. 77 (in the refrain and throughout); of reward most fair (*bi'l-ḥusnā*): Q. 92:9; of the signs of God (*bi-āyātinā*): Q. 78:28. These 'deniers' emerge as a group of their own.
21 See Paret's commentary (*Kommentar* [1971 edn.]) on *Sūrat al-Māʿūn* (Q. 107) concerning the closeness of Muhammad to ancient Arab ritual, which has been conceded by research so far. That Muhammad performed the *ṣalāt* ritual in the vicinity of the Kaaba is also a view held in the *sīra* of Ibn Hishām, though he emphasises the topos of the troubles caused by the Meccans which finally forced the Prophet to move to less exposed localities; see Peters, 'Quest'.
22 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, p. 24. See also Jan Assmann and Theo Sundermeier, eds., *Das Fest und das Heilige: Religiöse Kontrapunkte zur Alltagswelt* (Gütersloh, 1991), particularly the introduction.
23 Concerning the prayer practice linked to the time of *ḍuḥā*, see Rubin, 'Morning and Evening Prayers'.
24 For this interpretation, see Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran*.
25 See chapter 4, 'Images'.
26 Concerning the particular relationship between the suras introduced by oaths and liturgical recitation, see chapter 4, 'Images'.
27 As indicated by *Sūrat al-Muzzammil*.
28 See Wellhausen (*Reste*) and the data that Rubin ('Morning and Evening Prayers') extracted from Hadith sources.
29 See Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 188–9.
30 The relationship between *qur'ān* and *kitāb* has often been discussed in Qur'anic studies; see Arthur Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture* (New York, 1952). For a discussion of Bell's theory (put forward in *Introduction to the Qur'ān*) concerning the two, see Nagel, 'Bell's Hypothese'.
31 The history suras whose introductions lack a reference to scripture are *Sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ*, *Sūrat al-Muʾmin* (Q. 23), *Sūrat al-Qamar* (Q. 54), *Sūrat al-Furqān* (Q. 25) and *Sūrat al-Mulk*. The two latter history suras constitute special cases since they begin with a doxology. In the services of the Eastern Christian church, doxologies introduce a reading of scripture, thus we may assume a parallel function for the doxologies of these suras.
32 Introductory oaths invoking scripture are found in Q. 36:2 (*qur'ān*); Q. 37:3 (*dhikr*); Q. 38:1 (*qur'ān*); Q. 43:2 (*kitāb*); Q. 50:1 (*qur'ān*). For the oaths, see chapter 4, 'Images'.
33 The deictic words *dhālika* (that) or, more frequently, *tilka* (that) referring to the scripture (*al-kitāb, āyāt al-kitāb*) are used at the introduction of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, *Sūrat Yūnus* (Q. 10), *Sūrat Yūsuf* (Q. 12), *Sūrat al-Raʿd* (Q. 13), *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ* (Q. 26), *Sūrat al-Naml* (Q. 27), *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* (Q. 28) and *Sūrat Luqmān* (Q. 31).

34 References to scripture in the form of the one-word nominal phrase *kitābun* are found in the introductory sections of *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* (Q. 7), *Sūrat Hūd* (Q. 11) and *Sūrat Ibrāhīm* (Q. 14); similarly, the phrase 'the sending down of the scripture' (*tanzīlu'l-kitābi*) is found in *Sūrat al-Sajda* (Q. 32), *Sūrat al-Zumar* (Q. 39), *Sūrat Ghāfir* (Q. 40), *Sūrat al-Fuṣṣilat* (Q. 41), *Sūrat al-Jāthiya* (Q. 45) and *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf* (Q. 46); 'the mention of thy Lord's mercy' (*dhikru raḥmati rabbika*), in *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) and 'a sura that we have sent down' (*sūratun anzalnāhā*) in *Sūrat al-Nūr* (Q. 24).
35 See Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.
36 Jews as well as Eastern Christians used books of pericopes besides the Bible. The *Tiqqūn sōferīm*, in the Jewish case, and the *Evangelistarion*, in the Christian case, both contain the Biblical texts segmented into pericopes for use during the liturgy.
37 See the composition models for the middle and late Meccan suras in Neuwirth, *Studien*.
38 Concerning the particular structure of the suras, see Neuwirth, 'Einige Bemerkungen'.
39 Concerning the recollections of the Holy Land in the Qur'an, see chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
40 For more on this phenomenon, see Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, pp. 26–8.
41 For more on the *koiné*, i.e. the new language that arose as a result of contact between Arabic worship and the Jewish–Christian liturgy, see Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*; and, with specific reference to prayer, see Baumstark, 'Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus'.
42 On the syntactic structure of Qur'anic verses, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 117–56.
43 See chapter 6, '*Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (Q. 1): Opening of the Textual Corpus of the Qur'an or Introit of the Prayer Service?' in this volume.
44 On the emergence of Arabic writing, see Gerhard Endress, 'Die Arabische Schrift', in Wolfdietrich Fischer, ed., *Grundriss der arabischen Philologie, I, Sprachwissenschaft* (Wiesbaden, 1982), pp. 165–208. Concerning the data provided by Islamic tradition on the use of writing in the Qur'an, see Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, pp. 32–7; Schoeler, 'Schreiben und Veröffentlichen', pp. 19–27.
45 For the 'discovery' of the heavenly writing itself, see Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.
46 The *clausulas* serve a mostly metatextual function. They can be grouped into five categories: hymnal, affirming the revelation, evaluating, paraenetic and emphasising a state or an action; see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 157–70.
47 For an overview of the proportions between individual parts of suras, see ibid., pp. 318–21.
48 See William Graham, 'Qurʾān as Spoken Word: An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture', in Martin, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, pp. 23–40; idem, *Beyond the Written Word*; Kellermann, 'Die "Mündlichkeit" des Koran.
49 See chapter 6, '*Fātiḥa*'.
50 Ibid.
51 According to Q. 17:1, the Meccan sanctuary is where Muhammad's night journey to the 'furthest sanctuary', the temple district in Jerusalem, originates; see chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
52 The polemic passages are still in need of more detailed analysis.
53 See Matthias Radscheit, *Die koranische Herausforderung: Die taḥaddī-Verse im Rahmen der Polemikpassagen des Korans* (Berlin, 1996).
54 See chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
55 Concerning the issue of the direction of the *qibla*, see Arent J. Wensinck, 'Ḳibla (i) – Ritual and Legal Aspects', *EI2*, vol. V, pp. 82–3; Rubin, 'The *Kaʿba*'; chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
56 For the analysis of the narratives in the middle Meccan suras (Q. 36, Q. 50, Q. 67, Q. 72 and Q. 76) as well as the late Meccan suras (Q. 6, Q. 10, Q. 13, Q. 16, Q. 28, Q. 30, Q. 32, Q. 35, Q. 39, Q. 41, Q. 42, Q. 45 and Q. 46), see Neuwirth, *Studien*.
57 Thus, the first verse of Q. 57, Q. 59, Q. 61, Q. 62 and Q. 64: *All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies God*. Besides these, there is also direct speech without introduction, such as in the first verse of Q. 65, Q. 66: *O Prophet* (*yā ayyuhā'l-nabī*); Q. 63: *When the hypocrites*

come to thee (*idhā jā'aka'l-munāfiqūn*); Q. 33, Q. 49, Q. 60: *O believers* (*yā ayyuhā'l-ladhīna āmanū*); Q. 58: *God has heard the words of her that disputes with you* (*qad sami'a'llāhu qawla'llatī tujādiluka*); Q. 48: *Surely we have given thee a manifest victory* (*innā fataḥnā laka fatḥan mubīnan*); Q. 47: *Those who disbelieve and bar from God's way* (*alladhīna kafarū wa saddū 'an sabīli'llāhi*).

58 This elevated status is attained when the Prophet is appointed as intercessor in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*. In Q. 33:56, *God and His angels bless the Prophet. O believers, do you also bless him, and pray him peace* (*inna'llāha wa malā'ikatahu yuṣallūna 'alā nabiyyihi, yā ayyuhā'lladhīna āmanū ṣallū 'alayhi wa sallimū taslīmā*), God gives Muhammad his seal of approval. This verse goes furthest of all in approximating Muhammad to Jesus. It also figures several times in 'Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock, the very oldest surviving documentation of Qur'anic passages. See the text in Heribert Busse, 'Die arabischen Inschriften im und am Felsendom in Jerusalem', *Das Heilige Land* 109, nos. 1–2 (1977), pp. 8–24; chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'.

59 With the one exception in Q. 17:1 (the *isrā'* verse), all Qur'anic references to *al-masjid al-ḥarām* are Medinan and thus belong in the context of a dispute surrounding the rights of the Prophet and his community: Q. 2:144 and Q. 2:149 (the change of the *qibla*); Q. 2:191 (declaration of battle); Q. 2:217 (recollection of the exclusion of Muslims from the Kaaba ritual); Q. 5:2 (call to show respect to the Meccan symbols of ritual); Q. 8:34 (chastisement for the exclusion of Muslims from the Kaaba ritual); Q. 9:7 (treaty of the *'umrat al-qaḍā* [pilgrimage of completion]); Q. 9:19 (evaluation of the *siqāya* [the giving of water to the pilgrims] and *'imāra* office [the inhabiting of the Holy Mosque]); Q. 9:28 (the exclusion of the heathens); Q. 22:25 and Q. 48:25 (the damning of those who sought to exclude Muslims from the Kaaba). The Kaaba is mentioned once, in Q. 5:97.

60 See Q. 3:96; Q. 14:37 (Abraham's prayer for the divine institution of the *ṣalāt* ritual); Q. 2:124–9 (cleansing of the Kaaba by Abraham in preparation for the performance of the *ḥajj* and *'umra* rites [*ṭā'ifūn, 'ākifūn*] as well as the *ṣalāt* [*rukka' sujūd*]).

61 The change of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca becomes binding in Q. 2:144 and Q. 2:150.

62 See chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.

63 See Shelomo Dov Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966). A clear testimony of Moses' function as Muhammad's prototype is provided by *Sūrat al-Isrā'* which is traditionally linked to the institution of the Jerusalem *qibla*, and in which parallels between Muhammad and Moses are drawn several times; see chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.

64 The connection between the first institution of the *qibla* and the Prophet's night journey to Jerusalem is made by traditional exegesis as well; see the data in Abdalaziz A. Duri, 'Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period, 7th–11th Centuries AD', in Kamil Jamil Asali, ed. *Jerusalem in History* (Buckhurst Hill, 1989), pp. 105–25.

65 A clear example is found in the few verses contemplating the fateful event of the victory at Badr (Q. 8:41–4); see Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran*. While the individual details of the event are interpreted employing mythical images, they are not condensed into a myth of history. It is clear that the verses aim to evoke a recollection presumed to be still alive in the listeners' memory.

66 Examples of long suras which seem to have been put together retrospectively are Q. 2, Q. 3, Q. 4, Q. 5, Q. 8, Q. 9. However, it is worthwhile examining these suras for the structure they are based on, since their ultimate written composition (whose emergence we know nothing about) may rely on compositional principles, as has recently been shown in some cases by A.H. Mathias Zahniser, 'The Word of God and the Apostleship of 'Isā: A Narrative Analysis of Āl 'Imrān (3): 33–62', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36, no. 1 (1991), pp. 77–112; idem, 'Sūra as Guidance and Exhortation: The Composition of *Sūrat al-Nisā"*, in Asma Afsaruddin and A.H. Mathias Zahniser, eds., *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East* (Winona Lake, IN, 1997), pp. 71–85; Cuypers, *The Banquet*.

67 This would apply to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* (Q. 5); see analysis by Cuypers, *The Banquet*.

68 It seems safe to assume that when the long suras took shape, the nucleus of the *ṣalāt* ritual was already fixed. This was made up of the familiar set of gestures, short hymnal formulas including the *Fātiḥa* and a short *qirā'a* which every believer could perform without particular qualifications.

69 As is well known, the person praying is free to make use of any Qur'anic passage, although, in practice, attention is usually paid to meaningful units.

70 See Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History*.

71 Eugen Mittwoch, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des islamischen Gebets und Kultus* (Berlin, 1913); Carl Heinrich Becker, 'Zur Geschichte des islamischen Kultus', *Der Islam* 3 (1912), pp. 374–99; repr. in *Islamstudien*, vol. I, *Vom Werden und Wesen der islamischen Welt* (Leipzig, 1924), pp. 472–500.

72 While the use of the term sura within the Qur'an does not refer to the passages considered as suras within the canonical codex, it is probable that the 114 individual texts in their transmitted form date back to the pre-redaction text. See Nagel, 'Bell's Hypothese', p. 144: 'There is . . . evidence indicating that the suras as textual units of the Islamic revelation are older than the attempts, after Muhammad's death, at creating complete collections of the word of God he received. Thus the collecting might have been limited to collating finished units of text, i.e. suras. It is still possible that it was necessary to incorporate a number of fragments that were difficult to assign to one particular sura.' There is enough decisive proof from manuscript evidence to indicate that the suras we see today have the same form as the suras that were initially collected and collated; see Déroche, *La transmission écrite*.

73 The pre-canonical texts of the Qur'an seem not to have been framed by *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, *Sūrat al-Falaq* and *Sūrat al-Nās*. These suras are missing from the codex of Ibn Mas'ūd; see Jeffery, *Materials*, p. 23, and chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'.

6

Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q. 1): Opening of the Textual Corpus of the Qur'an or Introit of the Prayer Service? *†

We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated, and the mighty Qur'an (*Wa-laqad ataynāka sab'an mina'l-mathānī wa'l-Qur'āna'l-'aẓīm*, Q. 15:87)

IT IS difficult to think of any other text in Arabic that is recited as frequently, fulfils so many functions and occupies so central a position in the public and private lives of Muslims worldwide as the six verses of the first sura of the Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*.[1] The *Fātiḥa* is used in Muslim daily life as an incantation to avert physical or spiritual affliction,[2] as a short intercession for a fellow Muslim, be he alive or dead, and even as an expression of good will at the start an important action.[3] However, it is its ceremonial function in particular, as an 'oft-repeated', fixed part of the prayer ritual performed five times every day, that significantly contributes to exalting everyday life. Apart from its use in the prayer ritual, it has also become the solemn opening for diverse official ceremonies, including secular ones. Its solemn recitation affirms the *Fātiḥa* as a formula, given to the Muslim community, of publicly staged communication between God and man. Even those who do not audibly pronounce the *Fātiḥa* but only listen to someone else's recitation demonstrate at the end of it that, in their mind, they were following these words and no others by making special gestures uniquely associated with the *Fātiḥa*, namely

* Previously published in a slightly different form, in co-authorship with Karl Neuwirth, as '*Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*: "Eröffnung" des Text-Corpus Koran oder "Introitus" der Gebetsliturgie?' in Walter Gross, Hubert Irsigler and Theodor Seidl, eds., *Text, Methode und Grammatik* (St Ottilien, Germany, EOS, 1991), pp. 331–57. Reprinted by kind permission of the editors. Translation of the original provided by Gwendolin Goldbloom.

† Due to limitations of space, I have dispensed with a detailed documentation of the exegetical positions of the oldest commentaries. The instances given here are mostly quotations from Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) late Qur'anic commentary *al-Durr al-manthūr fī'l-tafsīr al-ma'thūr* (Cairo, 1983); they can easily be found in earlier commentaries as well.

opening their hands in supplication and stroking their cheeks with their palms, *masḥ al-wajh*.[4] Wherever believers find themselves in the world, this gesture will reflect that they are members of the Muslim faith. How is the first sura of the Qur'an so distinct from the others that it occupies this unique position in Muslim life? Did it already have this status during the genesis of the Qur'an or was it developed later? What is the relationship between its position within and outside of the Qur'an?

The *Fātiḥa* in Qur'anic Studies

First observations for the understanding of the *Fātiḥa*'s particular form and attempts at its historical classification within the context of the monotheistic environment at the time of the genesis of the Qur'an were made by Nöldeke and Schwally. They classified the *Fātiḥa* as a sura dating from the end of the first or the beginning of the second Meccan period, probably assembled from several separate phraseological elements used in monotheistic prayer,[5] and thus lacking any Islamic overtones. This appears to have been accepted as a sufficient characterisation, as it was repeated in later works without further examination of the *Fātiḥa*'s particular autonomous status. Neither Richard Bell's and Régis Blachère's translations and commentaries nor Rudi Paret's extensive commentary has added substantially to Nöldeke's and Schwally's observations.[6] At a later stage an attempt was made by Helmut Winkler to compare the *Fātiḥa* to the Lord's Prayer in Christianity,[7] thus establishing a parallel that was to become widely accepted without further interrogation by later scholars such as Goitein.[8] Given that two ambitious works published at the end of the twentieth century, an English translation of Qur'anic commentaries by Mahmoud Ayoub and a twelve-volume German translation of the Qur'an with commentary by Adel Theodor Khoury,[9] have also missed the opportunity to contribute new observations on the *Fātiḥa*, it would appear useful to add to this still unfinished picture.

The understanding of the *Fātiḥa*'s structure was significantly advanced by Mohammed Arkoun's 1974 article which proposed a novel interpretation.[10] In order to comprehend all the different levels on which the *Fātiḥa* has been, and can be, received, Arkoun distinguishes two different ways in which the sura was transmitted: the oral and the written. In the former he looks at the sura as the utterance of the Prophet, what we would call the pre-canonical text whose specific context in his view we are not able to reconstruct (Arkoun calls this 'énoncé 1: correspondant aux phrases effectivement émises par le prophète dans des conditions qui nous échappent').[11] In the latter he focuses on the *Fātiḥa* as part of the codified Qur'an, and thus as the basis of a long tradition

6

Sūrat al-Fātiḥa (Q. 1): Opening of the Textual Corpus of the Qur'an or Introit of the Prayer Service? *†

We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated, and the mighty Qur'an (*Wa-laqad ataynāka sabʿan minaʾl-mathānī waʾl-Qurʾānaʾl-ʿaẓīm*, Q. 15:87)

IT IS difficult to think of any other text in Arabic that is recited as frequently, fulfils so many functions and occupies so central a position in the public and private lives of Muslims worldwide as the six verses of the first sura of the Qur'an, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*.[1] The *Fātiḥa* is used in Muslim daily life as an incantation to avert physical or spiritual affliction,[2] as a short intercession for a fellow Muslim, be he alive or dead, and even as an expression of good will at the start an important action.[3] However, it is its ceremonial function in particular, as an 'oft-repeated', fixed part of the prayer ritual performed five times every day, that significantly contributes to exalting everyday life. Apart from its use in the prayer ritual, it has also become the solemn opening for diverse official ceremonies, including secular ones. Its solemn recitation affirms the *Fātiḥa* as a formula, given to the Muslim community, of publicly staged communication between God and man. Even those who do not audibly pronounce the *Fātiḥa* but only listen to someone else's recitation demonstrate at the end of it that, in their mind, they were following these words and no others by making special gestures uniquely associated with the *Fātiḥa*, namely

* Previously published in a slightly different form, in co-authorship with Karl Neuwirth, as '*Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*: "Eröffnung" des Text-Corpus Koran oder "Introitus" der Gebetsliturgie?' in Walter Gross, Hubert Irsigler and Theodor Seidl, eds., *Text, Methode und Grammatik* (St Ottilien, Germany, EOS, 1991), pp. 331–57. Reprinted by kind permission of the editors. Translation of the original provided by Gwendolin Goldbloom.

† Due to limitations of space, I have dispensed with a detailed documentation of the exegetical positions of the oldest commentaries. The instances given here are mostly quotations from Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) late Qur'anic commentary *al-Durr al-manthūr fī'l-tafsīr al-ma'thūr* (Cairo, 1983); they can easily be found in earlier commentaries as well.

opening their hands in supplication and stroking their cheeks with their palms, *masḥ al-wajh*.[4] Wherever believers find themselves in the world, this gesture will reflect that they are members of the Muslim faith. How is the first sura of the Qur'an so distinct from the others that it occupies this unique position in Muslim life? Did it already have this status during the genesis of the Qur'an or was it developed later? What is the relationship between its position within and outside of the Qur'an?

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of exegesis involving liturgical, theological and linguistic discourses ('énoncé 2 correspondant au texte . . . qui a été placé en tête du corpus'[12]). According to Arkoun, the *Fātiḥa* can be read/understood on three levels. First, as the Prophet's direct utterance and, thus, as a liturgical text to be pronounced by the faithful themselves in imitation of the Prophet's first recitation. Second, as the introductory section of the fixed canon of the Qur'an and, thus, as an already exegetically explored text whose many levels of meaning need to be studied. Third, as a text in which it would be beneficial to take a linguistic-critical approach without, however, losing sight of the two other approaches.

The following considerations are guided by an interest related to Arkoun's proposed ways of reading the *Fātiḥa*. However, they maintain that it is indeed possible to comprehend the *Fātiḥa* precisely in its pre-canonical form, as a specimen of oral liturgical speech. This is possible if the *Fātiḥa* is examined from the perspective of genre criticism, that is, by presupposing its function as a prayer thereby allowing for comparisons with related texts in neighbouring religious traditions. This kind of approach, which Arkoun does not consider, will enable us to draw clear conclusions with regard to the *Fātiḥa*'s original speech situation, that is, its *Sitz im Leben* prior to the Qur'an's canonisation. As we shall see, our valorisation of the *Fātiḥa* as an extraordinary Qur'anic text is supported by evidence that the redactors of the canonical text gave special treatment to this particular sura.

In order to assign the *Fātiḥa* to its genuine cultic context with greater certainty we will contextualise it with non-Islamic liturgical texts of a similar structure. This will enable us to identify more precisely the genre to which the *Fātiḥa* belongs and ultimately sharpen our insight into the specific character of this most extraordinary of suras. The reason, and also justification, for this step is the observation of several striking features which clearly distinguish the *Fātiḥa* as a separate corpus from the other texts in the Qur'an.

Five Issues Surrounding the *Fātiḥa*

Its verse numbering

In its canonical redaction according to the Kufan tradition, the *Fātiḥa* is made up of the seven verses quoted below.[13] Their quotation is slightly annotated here to mark the variants in delimiting (and thus counting) the verses which have been transmitted in Islamic tradition.

Q. 1

1 *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*
(*Bi'smi'llāhi'l-raḥmāni'l-raḥīm*/[- B, S, Md][14])

2 *Praise belongs to God, the Lord of* [*the Worlds*],[15]
(*al-ḥamdu li'llāhi rabbi'l-ʿālamīn*)
3 *the All-merciful, the All-compassionate,*
(*al-raḥmāni'l-raḥīm*)
4 *the Master of the Day of Doom.*
(*māliki yawmi'l-dīn*)
5 *Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succour.*
(*iyyāka naʿbudu wa iyyāka nastaʿīn*)
6 *Guide us in the straight path,*
(*ihdinā'l-ṣirāṭa'l-mustaqīm*)
7 *the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,*
not of those against whom Thou art wrathful,
nor of those who are astray.
(*ṣirāṭ'lladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim,*/ [+ B, S, Md]
ghayri'l-maghḍūbi ʿalayhim wa-lā'l-ḍāllīn)

Of the five Islamic traditions of counting the Qur'anic verses (*'add al-āy*) that have come down to us, it is the Kufan tradition (and the Meccan[16]) that includes the *basmala* – the initial invocation formula, 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate' (*Bi'smi'llāhi'l-raḥmāni'l-raḥīm*) – among the verses of the first sura. Since the text version which ultimately prevailed over its rivalling traditions and which is usually followed in scholarship today reflects the Kufan tradition, it is the above arrangement of the seven verses that we find in our copies of the Qur'an. Other textual traditions, however, present a different verse arrangement. Thus the Basran (B), the Damascene (S), and the Medinan (Md) traditions consider the *basmala* a text element independent of the sura, and do not count it as a verse; instead these traditions postulate that a verse ending lies in the middle of the final verse which is thereby divided in half. Both are unusual treatments of the text, since the *basmala* is nowhere else considered an integral part of its sura and counted as a verse; equally, the verse ending after "*alayhim*' in Q. 1:7 is not confirmed by a rhyming syllable. It is obvious that in both cases the verse arrangement is governed by extra-textual concerns, the necessity to attain seven, not six verses. Its textual representation, therefore, foreshadows the other problematic issues of the *Fātiḥa*.

Its position in the Qur'an

Another issue of the *Fātiḥa* is its position in the Qur'anic corpus. It is an accepted fact that the suras in the Qur'an are arranged roughly according to their length in descending order. While this principle is not strictly adhered to

throughout the Qur'an, and there is evidence of competing criteria in some instances,[17] the length of the suras in the ʿUthmānic text is unchallenged as being the paramount principle of their arrangement. The *Fātiḥa*, on account of its brevity, would therefore be expected to be positioned close to the end of the corpus; the fact that it precedes the longest sura of the Qur'an can only be explained by its special function as a kind of proem or a prayer prefixed to the whole Qur'an. The question of whether it is, in fulfilling this special function, actually part of the Qur'an or not has consequently been asked repeatedly by Muslim commentators.[18]

Its name

A further problem concerns its name. '*Fātiḥa*' is, unlike the names of other suras, not a characteristic word culled from the sura's text but, rather, a designation describing the sura's function. Elsewhere, this is only found in the designations of groups of suras, such as *Sūrat al-Falaq* and *Sūrat al-Nās* which are known as *al-muʿawwidhatān*, 'the two [suras] recited to seek refuge'. Hadith texts reflecting an early use of the *Fātiḥa*, presumably contemporary to the Prophet, mention it as *al-Fātiḥa* or, less frequently, use general terms such as *al-Kāfiya, al-Shāfiya* or *Umm al-Kitāb*,[19] which were probably honorific terms rather than actual names. We also find the name *al-Ḥamd*, after its initial word, competing with *al-Fātiḥa*. The former seems to have been the earlier designation. Though superseded by *al-Fātiḥa* in Sunni use, it retained prominence in the Shiʿi tradition where it is preferred over *al-Fātiḥa*. The question of the reference implicit in the name *al-Fātiḥa*, 'the opening', remains to be answered: does it point to the text corpus of the Qur'an or to an extra-Qur'anic textual unit?

Its classification

The text is remarkable first and foremost because the status of speakers in the text is unique within the entire Qur'an: the use of the first person plural 'we/us' in Q. 1:5–6 does not refer to the divine speaker, but to a group of individuals praying. The words are not God's but theirs. In keeping with this, the recitation of the *Fātiḥa* always concludes with Amen (*āmīn*). This observation has led some scholars to believe that the *Fātiḥa* is an introductory prayer forming part of the Qur'an.[20] Elsewhere in the Qur'an, however, prayers are found only within suras.[21] Exceptions might be seen in the two final suras, *Sūrat al-Falaq* and *Sūrat al-Nās*, which as noted previously are commonly referred to together as *al-muʿawwidhatān*. These texts, which are made up of apotropaic formulas, could be considered prayers provided one disregards the introductory imperative 'say' (*qul*) that introduces them and makes them unmistakeably

recognisable as words recommended to the individual for utterance in particular situations. Could the positioning of these texts at the very end of the Qur'an be more than an accidental consequence of the principle of length used to arrange the suras? Did the ʿUthmānic redaction committee intend to open and close the Qur'anic corpus with particularly spectacular texts that were in contrast to the rest of the suras? It is worth noting that, according to our information about the pre-ʿUthmānic codex of Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652), this codex differed from the ultimately canonised ʿUthmānic text in that it did not include the *Fātiḥa* or the *muʿawwidhatān*.[22] Considering the self-contained nature of the corpus, it is hard to justify their absence by arguing that Ibn Masʿūd's pre-canonical codex was incomplete; nor can it be argued that without the *Fātiḥa, Sūrat al-Falaq* and *Sūrat al-Nās* the ʿUthmānic text would lack a typologically appropriate introduction or an apt conclusion. The beginning of *Sūrat al-Baqara* would be perfectly convincing as the incipit of the Qur'an: *Alif Lam Mim/That is the* [*Scripture*], *wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the godfearing* (*ālif lām mīm; dhālika'l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi hudan li'l-muttaqīn*, Q. 2:1–2). Similarly, the profession of God's unity in *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q. 112) would seem an appropriate conclusion to the corpus: *Say: 'He is God, One'* (*qul huwa'llāhu aḥad*, Q. 112:1). When we find that the *Fātiḥa* is missing from Ibn Masʿūd's codex, we must take this as a serious indication that it had been transmitted differently from other suras.

Its relation to the *basmala*: Is the *basmala* part of the *Fātiḥa* text?

According to both the Kufan and the Meccan traditions, the *Fātiḥa* is the only sura which incorporates the *basmala* in the actual text of the sura, and this despite the fact that part of this formula is duplicated in Q. 1:3. The incorporation of the *basmala* was defended with conspicuous vigour in the exegetical tradition.[23] This is easily explained by the fact that the transmitters concerned felt compelled to arrive at a number of seven verses, obviously in order to prove that the *Fātiḥa* was identical to the seven oft-repeated verses mentioned in Q. 15:87, an identification which was apparently in dispute for some time. The incorporation of the *basmala* in the text is particularly noticeable because this means of achieving a particular number of verses was never applied in other suras; additional verse breaks that were occasionally demanded to achieve harmonious verse sequences were usually implemented in places where a passage could be said to end, even if they were without rhyme. The Basran, Damascene and Medinan traditions, as we saw, followed this latter principle. In the *Fātiḥa*, in order to achieve the number seven, they postulated that the first occurrence of *ʿalayhim* was a verse ending, thus ending up with a total of seven verses. Consequently, the decision taken in the Meccan

and Kufan numbering tradition to treat the *basmala* in this extraordinary manner still requires explanation.

The *Fātiḥa* and the Meccan Suras: Chronological and Typological Comparisons

Which suras can we presume to have been extant at the time the *Fātiḥa* was formulated?

As noted earlier, Nöldeke and Schwally date the *Fātiḥa* to either the end of the first or the beginning of the second Meccan period. Schwally notes parallel phraseology between this sura and suras of the later Meccan period: see the parallel phraseology of *al-ḥamdu li'llāh* (*Praise belongs to God*) in *Sūrat al-Kahf* (Q. 18; II[24]), *Sūrat Sabā'* (Q. 34; III), *Sūrat Fāṭir* (Q. 35; III), *Sūrat al-Naml* (Q. 27; II) and *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (Q. 17; II); of *al-ḥamdu li'llāhi rabbi l-'ālamīn* (*Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the Worlds*) in *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* (Q. 37; II), *Sūrat Ghāfir* (Q. 40; III), *Sūrat al-Zumar* (Q. 39; III) and *Sūrat Yūnus* (Q. 10; III); and of the divine name *al-raḥmān* in a number of suras of the second period. He seems to have difficulty in definitively dating the *Fātiḥa* since 'the specifically Islamic colouring . . . recedes to such a degree that the prayer might have well been found in any Jewish or Christian devotional book'.[25] Unsurprisingly, in view of the *Fātiḥa*'s emergence in the middle Meccan period, Schwally also adduces a number of parallels with texts used in Jewish or Christian worship, and which seem to him to be, individually or possibly even together, the textual basis of the *Fātiḥa*. Consequently, this also extends to the suras related to the *Fātiḥa* which, in Nöldeke's and Schwally's view, equally share a language influenced by Jewish and Christian models.[26] While in the case of any other sura these observations would be helpful to identify the date of their emergence, they are of little relevance in our present case, for it is the stylistic and typological peculiarities of the *Fātiḥa* that need to be clarified rather than its similarity to extra-Qur'anic texts.

The *Fātiḥa* and *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (Q. 15)

It is not possible, then, to determine the exact relationship between the *Fātiḥa* and any other individual sura or specific group of suras by relying merely on disparate cross references. To determine those suras and groups of suras which may have emerged at, or around, the same time as the *Fātiḥa* one has to look for a significant number of textual parallels, if possible even intra-Qur'anic indications of the influences of the *Fātiḥa*. A pursuit of the most important lexemes and phrases found in the *Fātiḥa* throughout the Qur'an reveals a

striking fact: it is *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (whose verse, Q. 15:87, later traditions linked closely to the *Fātiḥa*[27]) that is most similar to the *Fātiḥa* as regards the use of particular key lexemes.[28] *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* contains lexemes and phrases which had either not been established until the end of the second Meccan period or were still being negotiated, namely, 'Day of Judgement' (*yawm al-dīn*);[29] 'the straight path' (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*);[30] 'All-forgiving, All-compassionate' (*ghafūr raḥīm*), reminiscent of 'the Merciful, the Compassionate' (*al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*)[31] and the term *'ālamīn*, etymologically denoting 'worlds' but often used to mean 'humans', thereby indicating their belonging to both this world and the next.[32] *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* contains even further references to the *Fātiḥa*, such as words belonging to the root *'-b-d, ḥamd* and *shayṭān . . . rajīm* which recall the apotropaic formula 'I take refuge in God from the cursed Satan' (*a'ūdhu bi'llāhi mina'l-shayṭāni'l-rajīm*) that precedes the *Fātiḥa* in the prayer ritual. The following chart offers an overview of the suras with lexical or phraseological links to the *Fātiḥa* that may serve to illustrate this:

Sura	Lexeme/phrase						No. of elements in common
Q. 83	*'ālamīn*		*yawm al-dīn*				2
Q. 82			*yawm al-dīn*				1
Q. 81	*'ālamīn*	*shayṭān rajīm*					2
Q. 74			*yawm al-dīn*				1
Q. 73				*ghafūr raḥīm*			1
Q. 70			*yawm al-dīn*				1
Q. 69	*'ālamīn*						1
Q. 68	*'ālamīn*						1
Q. 67					*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*		1
Q. 56	*'ālamīn*		*yawm al-dīn*				2
Q. 52						*ḥamd*	1
Q. 51			*yawm al-dīn*				1
Q. 50						*ḥamd*	1
Q. 44	*'ālamīn*						1
Q. 43	*'ālamīn*						1
Q. 38	*'ālamīn*	*rajīm*	*yawm al-dīn*		*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*		4

(Continued)

(Continued)

Sura	Lexeme/phrase						No. of elements in common
Q. 37	*ʿālamīn*		*yawm al-dīn*		*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*	*ḥamd*	4
Q. 27	*ʿālamīn*		*yawm al-dīn*	*raḥmān raḥīm*		*ḥamd*	4
Q. 26	*ʿālamīn*		*yawm al-dīn*				2
Q. 25	*ʿālamīn*						1
Q. 23					*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*		1
Q. 21	*ʿālamīn*						1
Q. 20						imperative of *ʿ-b-d* / *ḥamd*	2
Q. 19					*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*	imperative of *ʾb-d*	2
Q. 18						*ḥamd*	1
Q. 15	*ʿālamīn*	*rajīm*	*yawm al-dīn*	*ghafūr raḥīm*	*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*	imperative of *ʾb-d* / *ḥamd*	7

With its seven relevant lexical similarities, *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* has by far the greatest number of parallels to the *Fātiḥa*; the next greatest are found in *Sūrat al-Naml* (Q. 27), *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* (Q. 37) and *Sūrat Ṣād* (Q. 38) with four shared relevant lexemes (*Sūrat al-Naml* and *Sūrat Ṣād* are suras later than *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*). Most importantly, *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* evokes the *Fātiḥa* in its concluding verse, Q. 15:99, which entails an exhortation to worship. The imperative mood used in this reference to the formulary of the *Fātiḥa*, occurring at the end of the sura, suggests an invitation of the listeners to continue the worship by reciting the *Fātiḥa*.

The entire concluding section, Q. 15:87–99, is unique. What is remarkable is that, rather than featuring the anticipated form, the affirmation of the Qur'anic revelation as such,[33] this conclusion presents the affirmation of the Qur'an's divine origin and of a further text given to the Prophet. This is the reference to the *sabʿ min al-mathānī*:

Q. 15:87–88

87 *We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated, and the mighty Qur'an.*
(wa-laqad ataynāka sabʿan mina'l-mathānī wa'l-qur'āna'l-ʿaẓīm)

88 *Stretch not thine eyes to that We have given [groups] of them to enjoy; and do not sorrow for them, and lower thy wing unto the believers,*

(lā tamuddanna ʿaynayka ilā mā mattaʿnā bihī azwājan minhum wa-lā taḥzan ʿalayhim wa'khfiḍ janāḥaka li'l-mu'minīn . . .)

Q. 15:98–99

98 *Proclaim thy Lord's praise, and be of those that bow*
(fa-sabbiḥ bi-ḥamdi rabbika wa kun mina'l-sājidīn)

99 *and serve thy Lord, until the Certain comes to thee.*
(waʿbud rabbaka ḥattā ya'tiyaka'l-yaqīn)

In my view, this sura, the major parts of which contain a polemic about the revelation and Biblical salvation history, not only provides evidence that the *Fātiḥa* was extant at the time of its composition, it also highlights the liturgical importance of this significant formulary.

The relation between the Fātiḥa *and Q. 15:87*

Nöldeke and Schwally number *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* as the ninth sura within the second Meccan period,[34] a phase during the Prophet's activities which also covers the emergence of a liturgically autonomous religious community in Mecca. If we accept that there is a close connection between the *Fātiḥa* and Q. 15:87 and, furthermore, if we accept the latter's position as the ninth sura (or even fifth, as it would be reckoned according to the investigations of the Corpus Coranicum project) of the second period, this would equally imply that the *Fātiḥa* dates back to the early part of the middle Meccan period. Consequently, the problem of identifying it with the *sabʿ min al-mathānī* would also have to be placed into this context. To date, the discussion on this relationship has been concerned almost exclusively with the argumentation propounded in Islamic tradition which is centred around the number seven. Thus, the various interpretations of the Qur'anic phrase *sabʿ min al-mathānī* have always been discussed outside the framework of the developmental history of the Qur'an suggested by *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*.[35] To undertake a revision of this, we must first ask: What can the meaning of *sabʿ min al-mathānī* have been in the middle of the second Meccan period, and what could it not have been?

In Q. 15:87: *We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated, and the mighty Qur'an*, the majority of the tradition sees a reference to the *Fātiḥa*.[36] The loan word *mathānī*, two instances of which occur in the Qur'an, is perhaps to be taken as the arabised version of the Hebrew word *mishnah* or the Aramaic word *mathnītā*,[37] meaning texts being or to be repeated. However, in Q. 15:87 its meaning cannot be understood unequivocally; it remains unclear which kind of unit it is that is intended for repetition. The meaning is clearer in the second instance:

Q. 39:23

God has sent down the fairest discourse as [*Scripture*], *consimilar in its oft-repeated, whereat shiver the skins of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts soften to the remembrance of God. That is God's guidance, whereby He guides whomsoever He will; and whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he*

(*Allāhu nazzala aḥsana'l-ḥadīthi kitāban mutashābihan mathāniya; taqsha'irru minhu julūdu'lladhīna yakhshawna rabbahum; thumma talīnu julūduhum wa qulūbuhum ilā dhikri'llāhi; dhālika hudā'llāhi yahdī bihi man yashā'u; wa man yuḍlili'llāhu fa-mā lahū min hād*)

The phrase *consimilar in its oft-repeated* is most likely a reference to the stories of retribution, the narratives of the earlier peoples who showed recalcitrance towards the proclaimed message and were exterminated by a catastrophe, that is, a divine judgement.[38] Rubin, who undertook a critical examination of the entire range of interpretations of the lexeme *mathānī* provided by the exegetical tradition, considers the only possible meaning of the phrase in Q. 15:87 to be 'stories of retribution': 'The *Mathānī* and the "Qur'ān" are the two names used here for the repetitive prophetic revelations with which Muhammad must be content.'[39] He rejects the identification of the *sab' min al-mathānī* with the *Fātiḥa* because there is only comparatively late proof of the exegetes' plea in favour of it. He proves all the other traditional interpretations of *mathānī* to be unsound for internal reasons. Following Rubin, Q. 15:87 ought to be translated as 'We have given thee the seven (stories) repeating themselves *and* (?) the mighty Qur'an'. Even if we overlook the oxymoron of the *wa-* connection between two elements whose relation is that one is part of the other, the interpretation of Q. 15:87, according to the meaning of the much later passage in Q. 39:14, remains problematic. In Q. 39:14, *mathānī* must be interpreted as referring to the fairly stereotypical retribution stories which were well known by the third Meccan period: the context of *mutashābihan* (consimilar) and the depiction of the narrative style as being so moving as to cause believers to shiver make this interpretation inescapable. However, this sense is not at all likely in the case of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* because at the stage in the development of the Qur'an when it emerged, there had not been time to formulate a wide range of stories of retribution comprising seven narratives, let alone stereotypical repetitions of these. Consequently, the meaning that *mathānī* has in Q. 39:23 – stories of retribution – must be rejected for the phrase *sab' min al-mathānī* for content-related reasons.

We return to the one interpretation, from among the traditional ones, that has remained irrefutable, namely, the idea that the *sab' min al-mathānī* is the *Fātiḥa*. After the preceding considerations, there is only one argument against this interpretation, which is the apparently very old interpretation that the later Hadith tradition so urgently wished to dispel: that there are not seven but only six verses in the *Fātiḥa*. If we look at this argument in more detail, we can easily situate it in its historical context and thus invalidate it. The observation of this incongruity between the explicitly stated *sab'* in Q. 15:87 and the actual number of six verses in the text is likely to have been made when Arab philologists started to concern themselves with the precise numerical value of numbers in the Qur'an,[40] thus raising doubts about the identification of the *sab' min al-mathānī* with the *Fātiḥa*. This scrutiny appears to be a hyper-meticulous treatment of the text, particularly since the number seven in Arabic is often used as an approximation, designating a sizeable number below ten. A number of parallel cases for such a reading of the Qur'an supported by the early grammarians – who, aiming to exclusively discern the meaning of the individual lexeme or morpheme, often disregarded the context – could be adduced.[41] This kind of literal understanding by the grammarians compelled the exegetes to insist on the necessity of having seven verses in the *Fātiḥa*, either by adding the *basmala* or by dividing the last verse, Q. 1:7, into two verses, one of them without rhyme, in order to salvage the traditional interpretation. This, in turn, has made the identification of the *Fātiḥa* with the *sab' min al-mathānī* appear even more suspicious in the eyes of Western critics.[42] For Q. 15:87, Rubin has convincingly argued that the word 'seven' should not be seen as a precise numerical value but as a symbolic number under ten. In spite of his mistaken interpretation of the *mathānī*, his work has facilitated the rediscovery of the correct understanding of the verse: thus, there is no obstacle in identifying the seven oft-repeated verses referred to here with the *Fātiḥa*. In this case, the wording of Q. 15.87 must be understood as the divine affirmation of the availability of the Qur'anic recitation text as well as a prayer formulary for the purpose of worship, the latter given to the Prophet alongside the Qur'an and not within the Qur'an.

The *Fātiḥa* as an Early Community Prayer Formula: Some Explanations for its Unique Features

If the *Fātiḥa* is identical to the *sab' min al-mathānī*, then Q. 15:87 can be explained as expressing something of the celebratory mood which one might assume that the Prophet and his community experienced upon this significant new achievement: while up until then their liturgical experience had probably

been restricted to the *ṣalāt* rituals and the recitation performed in a small circle of companions,[43] they now had at their disposal a sustainable formula for the communal prayer. This has to be considered a momentous step for the Qur'anic community on their path towards an organised liturgical life. This interpretation, of course, presupposes not one but two levels of Qur'anic self-expression in the vein already evoked by Arkoun: the prophetic proclamation emerging from a particular social and ideological situation (i.e. the Qur'an's *Sitz im Leben*) and the textual fait accompli, furnished by the form of the transmitted text. Scholarship usually studies the second level exclusively. To recognise the momentous progress in the building of the community that had been achieved through the introduction of the *Fātiḥa* requires, however, an awareness of the social relevance of individual Qur'anic texts as well.

The Structure of the *Fātiḥa*

Before we take the last step in the argument in favour of the *Fātiḥa*'s extra-Qur'anic liturgical locus, that is, the comparison between the early Islamic introductory prayer formula and other texts used as liturgical introductions, we must look briefly at the *Fātiḥa*'s structure. Q. 1:2–4 forms an exclamatory noun phrase which acquires the character of a litany through the polythematic predications in Q. 1:3, *al-raḥmān/al-raḥīm* and Q. 1:4, *māliki yawmi'l-dīn*. Q. 1:5 has two statements containing verbs of parallel structure; their very parallelism sustains the litany quality and maintains the emphasis of the beginning through the double anteposition of the object *iyyāka*. Following that, Q. 1:6–7 reiterates the appeal of the beginning through the use of the imperative while maintaining the litany style through three appositional reiterations of the object, *ṣirāṭa'l-mustaqīm/ṣirāṭa'lladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim/ [ṣirāṭa] ghayri'l-maghḍūbi ʿalayhim/wa-lā [ṣirāṭa]'l-ḍāllīn*.

While the stylistic tenor can indeed be called homogeneous, there is a noticeable caesura between Q. 1:2–5 and Q. 1:6–7. Q. 1:6 has no syntactic or morphological link with Q. 1:5. There is a further, weaker caesura between Q. 1:6 and Q. 1:7; however, the second person apostrophised in Q. 1:6 (*-ka*) is still addressed in Q. 1:7 in the imperative.

In view of the position of the names (or epithets) of God in Q. 1:2–4, the first part is a hymn, a praise of God; in view of the suffix reiterating the name of God in Q. 1:5, the second part is a prayer which is an appeal to God's power. A comparison between this structure and that of the other suras of the Qur'an reveals that the hymn in Q. 1:2–5 is entirely unusual, as the litany style is not developed to a similar degree anywhere else within the Qur'an. Equally, the second part stands out: two verses, Q. 1:3 and Q. 1:4, are made up of a single

syntagma, and only in Q. 1:5 is there any other instance of the repeated use of *Thee* (*iyyāka*) in the Qur'an. Nöldeke and Schwally have pointed out the widespread use of individual phraseological elements in the *Fātiḥa* in the context of Jewish and Christian texts for religious worship; however, it is not merely the wording but the tenor of the sura which is unusual in the Qur'an and points to liturgical parallels among Jews and Christians. Thus, for instance, the double emphasis on the object in Q. 1:5: *Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succour* (*iyyāka naʿbudu wa iyyāka nastaʿīn*), recalls quite spontaneously the triple emphasis on the object so very prominent in the Byzantine liturgy of St John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE): *se/se/soi* (thee) in the anaphoric prayer, 'we praise Thee, we bless Thee, we thank Thee' (*se hymnoumen, se eulogoumen, soi eucharistoumen*).[44] Furthermore, the triple reiteration – explicit at first, then implicit – of the *ṣirāṭ* concept at the end corresponds to a widely used formal element of ritual speech in the Christian and Jewish religions.

If we examine the hypothesis, already proposed by Winkler and repeated by Goitein, that in the *Fātiḥa* we are looking at an Islamic Lord's Prayer, we are now able to put this more precisely: although of all the current formularies the *Fātiḥa*'s significance and ubiquitous presence correspond most closely to the Christian prayer, and although both formularies contain hymnal elements in the first part and supplications in the second, their finer structures only correspond very roughly to one another. The first part of the Lord's Prayer is an invocation and, while it does incorporate hymnal elements, its tenor is determined by eschatological anticipation rather than by the praise of God; the second part is a communal petitionary prayer. The first part of the *Fātiḥa*, however, is a pure hymn. This means that the *Fātiḥa* is not, in its entirety, a prayer but in fact has the more complex structure of a hymn followed by a communal prayer. If we wanted to exemplify the *Fātiḥa*'s position within the service by comparing it to a Christian liturgical text, in my opinion, the parallel is to be found elsewhere, in the place which is already indicated by its name: at the beginning of the communal prayer rite.

The *Fātiḥa* as an Introit

Let us now take the name *Fātiḥa* literally in this sense and look at its function as the opening of the prayer ritual in the context of the forms customary for the opening ceremony in the communal worship at the time of the Prophet. The triumphant tone of the statement in Q. 15:87 already expressed something of the community's satisfaction and relief at having a powerful text fit for just this ceremonial situation. One hadith quoted by Suyūṭī carries this sentiment to the extreme when it hyperbolically refers to the *Fātiḥa* (and also the gestures

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of self-humiliation characteristic of Muslim ritual) as a mimesis of the angels' prayer ritual.[45] The text required for this function simply could not be an ordinary prayer, but had to be one whose tenor would be appropriate for the solemn entrance into a ritual act. Furthermore, its structure – made up of appeal and self-referential statements, in accordance with particular forms of communication between God and man developed in the Christian and Jewish religions – had to reflect its exalted function as an introduction to a service. If we look at the spectrum of liturgical forms, that is, the possible guidelines for the community within the monotheistic environment in which it emerged, we find a framework close to the *Fātiḥa* in the *Enarxis*, the Beginning, of the liturgy of St John Chrysostom.

	Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, *Enarxis* (= Basilios liturgy, *Enarxis*)[46]		**Islamic liturgy, *Fātiḥa*[47]**
i(a)	*Eulogēmenē hē basileia* Praised be the kingdom	i(b)	*al-ḥamdu li'llāhi* *Praise belongs to God*
ii(a)	*tou patros kai tou hyou* of the Father, the Son	ii(b)	*rabbi'l-ʿālamīn* *the Lord of the Worlds*
iii(a)	*kai tou hagiou pneumatos* and the Holy Spirit	iii(b)	*al-raḥmāni'l-raḥīm* *the All-merciful, the All-compassionate*
iv(a)	*nyn kai aei kai eis tous aiōnas ton aiōnon* now and always and in eternity	iv(b)	*māliki yawmi'l-dīn* *the Master of the Day of Doom*
v(a)	*en eirenē tou kyriou deēthōmen* In peace we pray to the Lord	v(b)	*iyyāka naʿbudu wa iyyāka nastaʿīn* *Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succour.*
vi(a)	*kyrie eleēson* Lord, have mercy	vi(b)	[*al-raḥmāni'l-raḥīm*] [*the All-merciful, the All-compassionate*]
vii(a)	*Hyper tou rhysthēnai hēmas apo* For saving us from any lapse	vii(b)	
viii(a)	*pasēs thlipseos, orgēs, kindynou* from wrath and from danger	viii(b)	[*ghayri'l-maghḍūbi ʿalayhim*] [*not of those against whom Thou art wrathful*]
ix(a)	*kai anankēs, tou kyriou deēthōmen* and from violence we pray to the Lord	ix(b)	[*wa-lā'l-ḍāllīn*] [*nor of those who are astray*]
x(a)	*Antilabou, sōson, eleēson* Accept, save us, have mercy	x(b)	
xi(a)	*kai diaphylaxon hēmas,* and watch over us	xi(b)	*ihdinā'l-ṣirāṭa'l-mustaqīm* *Guide us in the straight path*
xii(a)	*ho theos, tē sē chariti* O Lord, through your grace!	xii(b)	*ṣirāṭa'lladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim* *the path of those whom Thou hast blessed*
xiii(a)		xiii(b)	*ghayri'l-maghḍūbi ʿalayhim*

			not of those against whom Thou art wrathful
xiv(a)		xiv(b)	*wa-lā'l-ḍāllīn* *nor of those who are astray*
xv(a)		xv(b)	

Both these liturgies display a hymnal initial part in the form of a nominal exclamation i(a) and i(b), which is continued as one syntactically complex sentence in Chrysostom's Doxology, ii(a), and as two subsequent polythematic predications in the *Fātiḥa*, ii(b). Taken together with the following antiphonic response, repeating *kyrie eleēson*, v(ia), this Greek sentence typologically contains all the essential elements of the first part of the *Fātiḥa*: the praise (*eulogein* and *ḥamida*), i(a) and i(b);[48] the reference to the eschatological kingdom (*basileia* and *mālik yawm al-dīn*), i(a) and iv(a); the response that God rules over the present and eternity (*nyn kai aei kai eis tous aiōnas ton aiōnōn* and *rabbi'l-ʿālamīn*), iv(a) and ii(b); and the idea of mercy (*eleēson* and *raḥmān raḥīm*), vi(a) and iii(b). The beginning of the subsequent *ectenia* (petition, litany) announces the prayer *tou kyriou deēthomen*, v(a), which is comparable to the declaration *iyyāka naʿbudu wa iyyāka nastaʿīn*, v(b), although the latter has universal application while the former contains stronger emphasis on the individual situation. It ends with a petition for (1) support and protection: compare *antilabou . . . kai diaphylaxon hēmas*, x(a)–xi(a) with *ihdinā*, xi(b); (2) deliverance from divine wrath: compare *apo pasēs orgēs*, vii(a)–viii(a) with *ghayri'l-maghḍūbi ʿalayhim*, viii(b); (3) deliverance from danger and need: compare *apo kindynou kai anankēs*, viii(a)–ix(a) with *wa-lā'l-ḍāllīn*, ix(b). Of course, the Arabic wording shows specifically local metaphors and ends in an invocation of God's mercy: compare *alladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim*, xii(b) with *tē sē chariti*, xii(a).

This summary comparison of the two texts by no means intends to claim that there is a direct dependence of the *Fātiḥa* on the liturgy of St John Chrysostom; a comparison with the most ancient form of the synagogue service would perhaps have had quite a similar result.[49] The key point is the genre of speech; the opening of any service in the monotheistic environment of the *Fātiḥa* had to be solemn enough to do justice to the ceremonial occasion, and was required to incorporate a number of standard topics in order to establish communication between the community and God. It relied on the tenor of a litany, on the one hand, and the combination of hymn and *ectenia*, on the other. In availing itself of these typological characteristics, the *Fātiḥa* fulfils these conditions; indeed, by virtue of its brevity and its climax with the triple petition for true guidance, it even exceeds them. Many hadiths, such as the one recounted here, express certainty that this text was one of a kind:

> The Prophet came outside to Ubayy b. Kaʿb and said to him: 'Ubayy, shall I teach you a text (*sūra*) the like of which was not sent down in the Torah nor in the Gospel nor in the Psalms nor in the Qur'an (*Furqān*)?' He said: 'Yes, Messenger of God.' Thereupon the Prophet asked him: 'How do you recite in prayer?' And he recited 'the Mother of the Qur'an' (*umm al-Qur'ān*, i.e. the *Fātiḥa*). And the Prophet said: 'I swear by Him who holds my soul in His hand: neither in the Torah nor in the Gospel nor in the Psalms nor in the Qur'an is revealed anything like it: It is the seven oft-repeated verses (*innahā'l-sabʿu mina'l-mathānī*)'.[50]

NOTES

1 The *Fātiḥa* is generally presented as consisting of seven verses; however, this chapter disputes this numbering, arguing that it is in fact composed of only six verses. The reason for this will be presented later in the chapter.

2 For hadiths on healing a scorpion's sting, neutralising poisonings or curing people possessed through the use of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, see Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, p. 14; Adel Theodor Khoury, *Der Koran: Arabisch–Deutsch* (Gütersloh, 1992), p. 138.

3 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, p. 13.

4 Ignaz Goldziher, 'Zauberelemente im islamischen Gebet', in Ignaz Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Hildesheim, 1970), V, pp. 56–7.

5 Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, p. 110.

6 Bell, *Qur'ān*; Régis Blachère, tr., *Le Coran* (Paris, 1966); Paret, *Kommentar*. For a summary of the discussion, see William Graham, 'Fātiḥa', *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 188–92.

7 Helmut Winkler, 'Fātiḥa und Vaterunser', *Zeitschrift für Semitistik* 6 (1928), pp. 238–46.

8 Goitein, 'Prayer in Islam'.

9 Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, vol. I (Albany, NY, 1984); Khoury, *Der Koran*.

10 Mohammed Arkoun, 'Lecture de la Fātiḥa', in Pierre Salmon, ed., *Mélanges d'islamologie: Volume dédié à la mémoire de A. Abel* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 18–44; repr. in *Lectures du Coran* (Paris, 1982), chapter 3.

11 'Statement 1: corresponding to sentences actually issued by the Prophet in conditions beyond our [knowledge]'.

12 'Statement 2: corresponding to the text . . . which has been placed at the head of the corpus'.

13 It is quoted from the printed edition, Cairo 1925.

14 The five Islamic traditions according to which the verses of the Qur'an have been divided are: Kufan, Meccan, Basran, Damascene and Medinan. Concerning these individual traditions with respect to the *Fātiḥa* text, see Spitaler, *Verszählung des Koran*, pp. 31–2. The abbreviations used here refer to the verse numbering systems, each associated with the tradition of a particular metropolitan tradition: B = Basra, S = Damascus, Md = Medina; + or – indicates the positive assumption or negation of a verse-ending in that particular tradition; see Spitaler, ibid., p. 31.

15 Arberry translates this as 'Lord of all Being'. This is the most frequently used translation; however, it does not capture the eschatological connotation of the expression which is part of the Qur'anic text politics, the 'Biblicisation' of the Arabic language. *'Ālamīn*, 'Worlds', refers to this world and the hereafter. In contrast to *rabb al-nās* (*Lord of men*, Q. 114:1), *rabb al-'ālamīn* is a newly coined formula to express that man is related to the two realms of the here and now and the hereafter. See the discussion of *'ālamīn* by Simonetta Calderini, '*Tafsīr*

of *'ālamīn* in *rabb al-'ālamīn*, Qur'ān 1:2', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (1994), pp. 52–8. *'Ālamīn* denotes 'worlds', i.e. the mundane and the hereafter; it could also – if taken as a contracted *nisba* (*'ālamīyyīn* becomes *'ālamīn*) – denote 'inhabitants of the worlds'.

16 In the case of the *Fātiḥa*, the Kufan tradition is identical to the Meccan tradition.

17 On the competing principles of arranging the suras in the Qur'an, see Hans Bauer, 'Über die Anordnung der Suren und über die geheimnisvollen Buchstaben', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 75 (1921), pp. 1–20. For new reflections on the sura order, see Dayeh, 'al-Ḥawāmīm'.

18 Suyūṭī (*al-Durr al-manthūr*) begins his commentary by questioning whether the *Fātiḥa* is part of the Qur'an.

19 On the subject of the names of the suras, see Lamya Kandil, 'Die Surennamen in der offiziellen Kairiner Koranausgabe und ihre Varianten', *Der Islam* 69 (1992), pp. 44–60.

20 See Bell, *Qur'ān*, I, p. 1; Blachère, *Coran*, pp. 110–26. In accordance with Winkler ('Fātiḥa und Vaterunser'), Goitein ('Prayer in Islam') even calls it an 'Islamic Lord's Prayer'. He does, however, emphasise the *Fātiḥa*'s extra-Qur'anic *Sitz im Leben* as a prayer formula in the *ṣalāt*.

21 See Baumstark's typology of Qur'anic prayers in 'Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus'.

22 Suyūṭī (*al-Durr al-manthūr*) also remarked on the *Fātiḥa*'s absence from Ibn Masʿūd's codex; see Jeffery, *Materials*, pp. 20–24. Niketas of Byzantium (fl. 860–873) appears to have used editions of the Qur'an without the *Fātiḥa* for his 'Refutation of the Qur'an' as late as the third/ninth century; see Khoury, *Der Koran*, p. 132. An understanding of the *Fātiḥa* as a liturgical preface, not to the entire corpus but rather to any recitation of Qur'anic texts, seems to transpire in a tradition ascribed to Ibn Masʿūd: 'Likewise it is transmitted on the authority of 'Abd Allāh b. Masʿūd that he did not write the Exordium of the Scripture in his codex. He was asked: "Why did you not write down the Exordium (*al-Fātiḥa*) of the Scripture?" He replied: "If I wrote it at the start of the chapter of the Cow then I would write it at the beginning of every chapter, in the opinion thereby that just as it is the opening (*fātiḥa*) of the Scripture, it is the opening for every chapter" '; see Toby Mayer, *Keys to the Arcana: Shahrastānī's Esoteric Commentary on the Qur'an* (Oxford, 2009), p. 72. Information kindly provided by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga.

23 Suyūṭī (*al-Durr al-manthūr*, pp. 12–13), for example, adduces five hadiths. The Shiʿi tradition places a strong emphasis on the counting of the *basmala* as part of the *Fātiḥa*.

24 The Roman numerals here refer to the first (I), second (II) and third (III) Meccan periods.

25 Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, p. 110.

26 Ibid., pp. 112–14.

27 While the prophetic traditions that state this connection are not among the very oldest, as shown by Uri Rubin ('Exegesis and *Ḥadīth*: The Case of the Seven *Mathānī*', in Hawting and Shareef, *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, pp. 141–56), they do defend the understanding of Q. 15:87 as referring to the *Fātiḥa*.

28 See chapter 7, 'Referentiality'.

29 It occurs eight times in the first Meccan period: Q. 51:12, Q. 56:56, Q. 70:26, Q. 74:46, Q. 82:15, Q. 82:17, Q. 82:18 and Q. 83:11; and only three times in the second Meccan period before *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*: Q. 26:82, Q. 37:20 and Q. 38:78.

30 It occurs in the second period: Q. 19:36; Q. 23:73; Q. 37:118; Q. 43:43, 61 and 64; Q. 67:22.

31 *Ghafūr raḥīm* occurs in the first and second periods: Q. 73:20; Q. 27:11; *raḥmān raḥīm*: Q. 27:30.

32 It occurs seven times in the first Meccan period and sixteen times in the second Meccan period before *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*.

33 For the compositional element of the confirmation of the revelation, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 264–6.

34 A more recent investigation carried out by the Corpus Coranicum project places *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* as the fifth sura, after *Sūrat al-Qamar*, *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*, *Sūrat Nūḥ* (Q. 71) and *Sūrat al-Insān*.

35 Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, p. 114: 'The mystery of the time of its [the *Fātiḥa*'s] composition would be solved in one stroke if the words "seven of the *mathānī*" [Q. 15:87] indeed referred to [*Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*], as many Muslim exegetes maintain. This, however, is quite doubtful. The expression "seven of the *mathānī*" implies the presupposition that there were other *mathānī* as well. Thus the Muslim tradition, which tacitly substitutes *al-sabʿ al-mathānī*, "the seven *mathānī*", cannot be correct . . . And if [*Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*] only has six verses, that alone would be reason enough why the "seven *mathānī*" in [Q. 15:87] cannot refer to it.' Schwally then advocates the translation of *mathānī* (Q. 15:87 and Q. 39:24) as 'tradition', in analogy with the Jewish *mishnah*, which corresponds to the Jewish-Aramaic *mathnīthā*, without, however, illuminating in any way the meaning of the verses. In contrast to Schwally's view, it must be pointed out that the periphrastic expression employing an apparently partitive *min* (*sabʿ min al-mathānī* for *sabʿ mathānin*) is a stylistic device of emphasis in the Qur'an as well as in poetry, and that consequently the paraphrase used by the exegetes is indeed justified. Above all, Schwally disregards Qur'anic chronology without justification when he equates a loan word, obviously intended to sound foreign in an early sura (Q. 15:87), with a later instance (Q. 39:23) of the same word in a context where the meaning of the referent is much more clearly discernible. Rubin's examination of the traditional interpretations of *mathānī* in 'Exegesis and *Ḥadīth*' shows no interest in Qur'anic chronology, as he is only referring to Hadith texts.

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39 Rubin, 'Exegesis and *Ḥadīth*', p. 150.

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41 The closest parallel to our present case may well be that Qur'anic philologists determined the existence of a plural number of paradise gardens because *janna* is used in the dual number particularly in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, see ibid.

42 Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, pp. 115–16; Rubin, 'Exegesis and *Ḥadīth*'.

43 See chapter 4, 'Images'.

44 For the historical background to this part of the liturgy, see Hans-Joachim Schulz, *Die Byzantinische Liturgie: Vom Werden ihrer Symbolgestalt* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1964), pp. 24–8.

45 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, p. 17.

46 See the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, 'Die Heilige und göttliche Liturgie unseres Vaters unter den Heiligen Johannes Chrysostomos', in Neophytus Edelby, ed., *Liturgikon 'Messbuch' der byzantinischen Kirche* (Recklinghausen, 1967), pp. 401–87. The transcription is based on the Greek original (Athens, Apostolikē Diakonia, 1980 and later) without consideration for modern phonetic realisation. The opening of the service, named *Enarxis*, corresponds to the Western introit, while the term *Eisodos* is reserved for the Small Entrance, the procession of the clergy to the altar with the Book of Gospel.

47 The *Fātiḥa* is listed here in the order of its verses which is not congruent with the sequence in the *Enarxis* in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom. In places of closer thematic correspondence, the respective *Fātiḥa* verses are quoted in square brackets in the table, irrespective of their order in the Qur'an, next to the Greek reference.

48 Concerning the correspondence between *al-ḥamdu li'llāh* and *eulogētos ho theos*, see Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, p. 112.

49 For comparisons with the Jewish liturgy, see Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*. The correspondence between *al-ḥamdu li'llāh/rabbi'l-ʿālamīn* in the *Fātiḥa*'s opening doxology and the use of *Berākha: Barūkh attā, Adōnai, Elōhēnū, melekh ha-ʿōlām* . . . at the start of the Jewish liturgy was already noted by Nöldeke; Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, p. 112.

50 Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, p. 13. Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. 29/649) was one of the Prophet's scribes to whom the second most important pre-ʿUthmānic codex (after the codex of Ibn Masʿūd) is ascribed.

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Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (Q. 15): Observations on the Qur'anic 'Canonical Process' and the Emergence of a Community*

The Problem of the Qur'anic Canon

Canonisation: Social and cognitive dimensions

RECENT STUDIES on the Qur'an have focused anew on the problem of its canonisation, raising it to a central issue in Qur'anic research.[1] What these studies have called into question is the traditional account about the redaction and publication of a unified and authorised final version of the Qur'an corpus, which came to occupy the rank of a scripture bearing an intrinsic logic of its own. By focusing on this final phase, by classifying it as the crucial event in the Qur'an's genesis, however, one sets a particular epistemological course whereby the literary image of the Qur'an reflecting a text still in progress, indeed, displaying a unique microstructural diversity due to its evolution out of an extended process of a liturgical communication, becomes blurred. Its microstructural diversity is eclipsed by its macrostructural weight, by the social importance of the henceforth normative corpus and its ideological implications for the construction of the community's identity. Rippin a few years ago proclaimed the macrostructural approach an appropriate basis upon which to read scripture in the twenty-first century.[2] In my view, this manifesto overlooks important steps of inquiry, still missing today, in Qur'anic research. The issue of the canonicity of the Qur'an will therefore be taken up anew, though with the changed objective of shedding light on its implications for the text itself. Until now, too little attention has been paid to the cognitive aspects

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of canonisation. Does canonisation necessarily mark a definable turning point in the development of the text, the point at which its growth has come to an end? Or may canonisation be understood as an extended process which is mirrored in the text itself, whose final codification only lodges it in a new interpretive space? From the community's perspective, what essentially new qualities did the corpus acquire after its literary fixation, after the authorisation of a final version?

Let us consider the last question first. According to the predominant Islamic tradition,[3] the authoritative final version of the Qur'an was due to the redaction undertaken by a committee summoned by ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, the third caliph. The codex that thus came into existence, does, it is admitted, impose on the suras a sequence which until then had not been fixed; in many cases it also accommodates passages that had likely been communicated independently in response to some social exigency, assembling them into composite suras. However, it appears that the committee clung faithfully to the text material whose authenticity was warranted by reliable oral and/or written tradition, considering all the revelations still available at the time; they thus tacitly followed the canonical formula to leave out nothing and to add nothing.[4] The performance of the committee has, therefore, traditionally been identified with the act of a collection (*jamʿ*) in perfect accordance with the concept of its commissioner ʿUthmān, who is reported to have imposed on the redactors – apart from the observing of some linguistic impositions – no further task than the gathering of all still available parts of the Qur'an. The presentation of the events as tradition reports them (that is, that the Qur'an was canonised from an early stage in the development of Islam) is not implausible at all; at least, it fits well with the findings offered by the text itself. The new codex does not offer any justification, neither theological nor chronological, for the sequence of the individual texts (suras and parts of suras) which it encompasses, but apparently arranges these according to technical criteria external to the Qur'an.[5] It thus displays inextinguishable traces of its intended character as a mere collection, or actually an anthology, of texts – presenting itself as a corpus of unconnected textual units of diverse structure – not allowing for an immediate classification under one particular genre.

The fact that the collection had been carried out somewhat hastily and thus had to proceed in a rather mechanical fashion (i.e. without regard for theological criteria) is duly explained and justified in the traditional reports as stemming from political constraints. Still, the outcome gave rise to a problematic development: the joint codification of loosely composed passages and often unframed, conceptually isolated communications (so characteristic of the long suras) together with complex polythematic structures and

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The fact that the collection had been carried out somewhat hastily and thus had to proceed in a rather mechanical fashion (i.e. without regard for theological criteria) is duly explained and justified in the traditional reports as stemming from political constraints. Still, the outcome gave rise to a problematic development: the joint codification of loosely composed passages and often unframed, conceptually isolated communications (so characteristic of the long suras) together with complex polythematic structures and

mnemotechnically sophisticated pieces (characteristic of the short and medium-length suras) resulted in a most heterogeneous ensemble. The consequence of this was that once these elements merged into a comprehensive and closed corpus, the *muṣḥaf*, their liturgical *Sitz im Leben* (their communicational context in the emergence of the community) became neutralised. It is true that previously defined text units, distinguishable through reliable devices such as introductory formulas and markers of closure, were retained by the redaction and labelled 'suras'. However, as text units, they lost much of their significance, for along with them in the same codex there were other units bearing the same label 'sura' whose individual passages did not form a coherent literary structure, and which thus invalidated the structural claim raised by the neatly composed suras. These latter types of neatly composed suras, therefore, ceased to be recognised as individual literary units transporting messages of their own and mirroring individual processes of communication that indicate the various stages of the development of the community.[6] Once all parts of the corpus had become equal in rank, arbitrarily selected texts could be extracted from the context of their sura and be used to explain arbitrarily selected others. Having thus become virtually decontextualised, they were stripped of the tension they once partook of within their original units. Genuine text units thus lost their literary integrity and could therefore mistakenly be thought to be mere repetitions of each other.

Thus, with its final canonisation as a codex, the Qur'an had become dehistoricised. It was not the process of its successive emergence, which is mirrored in the text, that was acknowledged as its brand but the timeless, eternal quality of its message. This made the understanding of the Qur'an all the more dependent on the *sīra*, a corpus that had been grafted onto the Qur'an by its readers and listeners from early times onwards, even though it had been transmitted and codified separately.[7] Prophetic tradition, which developed a metahistory of the Qur'an similar to that of the Jewish Haggadah, thus took the place that should legitimately have been occupied by intra-Qur'anic history (i.e. the history, however scarce in chronological evidence, of a liturgical and social communication process, that distinctly took textual shape in the Qur'an).[8] To reveal the still traceable traits of that history which has an important bearing on the problematic issue, raised in the first question, of whether canonisation occurred at a specific point or gradually over time, a systematic literary investigation of the microstructure of the Qur'an remains an urgent requirement.

The following discussion of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* is meant to be a step in that direction. It is, at the same time, an attempt to comply with Andrew Rippin's

demand that the Qur'an be studied by (a) 'situating . . . [it] in its literary tradition' and (b) 'situating . . . [it] at the focal point of a reader-response study'.[9] However, diverging from Rippin's proposal, we will not (a) go so far as to replace an immediately traceable intra-Qur'anic context with a speculative Biblical or post-Biblical one to provide the appropriate 'literary tradition' nor shall we (b) embark on reconstructing a post-Qur'anic reader response from the exegetical literature. Rather, what shall be analysed on the basis of an individual sura is the Qur'anic communication process between proclaimer and listeners. Thus, the place of the reader response will be taken by a listener response, whereby the literary concept of the implied reader will be modified into that of the implied listener (b).[10] The situating of the Qur'an in its literary tradition (a) will be realised through the investigation of its peculiar self-referentiality. However, the study will not stop short by solely noting particular instances of a Biblical background, but will proceed to examine the position of the sura as a particular stage in an extended canonical process.

Two complementary models to be tested on the Qur'an: Canon from below/canonical process

For our assessment of the Qur'anic canon problem, it is promising to adopt the typological distinction made by Aleida and Jan Assmann between a 'canon from *above*' and a 'canon from *below*'.[11] The old suras in particular seem to mirror a development which, in its essential traits, reflects a canonisation from below as characterised by Assmann and Assmann:

> Perhaps it is true that the 'canon from below' particularly underlines the *social* aspect, whereas the 'canon from above' rather focuses on the *cognitive* aspect. We shall juxtapose two canons: a canon to be described as *power-oriented*, and a canon that relies on a particular *source of meaning*. By 'source of meaning' we understand phenomena, conceptualised in social studies as 'charisma', that is a truth not warranted by an institution but by a person (or sometimes by a situation). A charismatic situation needs at least two protagonists: the bearer of charisma, i.e. the leader, and his followers, a group of the faithful who submit themselves to his word as being ultimately binding. This relation is diametrically opposed to the *norms* of the sociopolitical surroundings . . . Whenever the message is preserved to survive beyond the situation in which the original group was directly interacting, it will usually undergo a profound change in structure. The message gains a new appearance through scripturalisation and, moreover, through institutionalisation.[12]

On the one hand, these observations may serve, simultaneously, as a useful impulse to move the Qur'anic canon problem back to the genesis of the text

itself and as a deterrent to the impulse to localise it with the first official edition of the codex. On the other hand, the case of the Qur'an could provide some relevant modifications to the above-mentioned model, which appears to have been primarily deduced from the New Testament writings. Thus, the phenomenon of the aura emanating from 'the bodily contact of the charismatic leader',[13] so essential for the Gospels, is totally absent in the case of the Qur'an in which its place is taken by the spoken and aurally received word.

In the case of the Qur'an, then, a 'canon from below' precedes the 'canon from above'. The latter only comes about with the authoritative final redaction, which became necessary to counteract the pressure of a reactionary tendency towards provincialisation and fragmentation. The 'canon from below' thereby changed into a 'canon from above', a development comparable to that in early Christianity when the official church contracted a pact with political power.[14]

What textual signs of a developing canon from below does the Qur'an text display? To discern these, we may draw on new approaches developed in recent Biblical studies, essentially due to the American scholar Brevard Childs who proposed that the genesis of a canon should be understood as a process of growth.[15] Canonical status in this context no longer pertains to the officially codified final form of a text; rather, it stems from 'the consciousness of a binding covenantal character deeply rooted in the texts' that manifests itself in continuous references of later emerging text units to a text nucleus and by recurrent instances of intratextuality among the text units that have developed around the nucleus.

On the basis of these concepts of canon we will try, in this chapter, to escape the dilemma of the two presently dominating positions so infelicitously hindering each other: a traditional position of Qur'anic interpretation relying heavily on the *sīra* and thereby unduly rehistoricising the Qur'an,[16] and a counter-position that not only dismisses the *sīra* but also rigorously de-historicises the Qur'an, confining itself to the macrostructure of the officially canonised version and thereby disregarding the distinctive internal literary structures of the Qur'an. This chapter argues for a third way: a reading of the Qur'an that respects the redactionally warranted unit 'sura' as a literary genre, studying it as a stage in a communicational process. Its striking pattern of debate will thus be the focus of interest.[17] The sura will not be considered as a message of a speaker moving linearly in the direction of the addressee but as a communication between a larger number of dramatis personae involved in the process of the emergence of a community. However, since this communication as documented in the Qur'an is not conveyed as a mere transcript of the message but has been 'literarised' (i.e. condensed by the force of an artistic objective into a discourse of its own), it deserves to be studied as a literary phenomenon.

A Case Study: *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* as a Literary Text

Preliminary remarks

What recommends *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* as the basis for a revision of the canon problem is its particularly striking self-referentiality:[18] it is one of the few suras to mark explicitly its particular position within the growing mass of Qur'anic pericopes. On a further level, this text mirrors itself: the crucial development attested in the sura, the emergence of a community, the confrontation of two parties, *antum/hum* (believers/unbelievers), that are ideologically no longer compatible, is aetiologically traced back to a divine plan developed in pre-existence and quoted in the sura. The cultic dimension of this socio-religious development is again reflected on the structural level of the text where particular formulas point to a liturgical *Sitz im Leben*, that is, to the sura's being intended for use as a scriptural pericope in the framework of a religious service. This impression is further enhanced by the projections of nearly all the verses of the Muslim communal prayer, the *Fātiḥa*, which appear interspersed in the text. We will first survey the literary composition of the sura, then turn to its communicational structure and finally draw conclusions from the double dimension of the Qur'an as a literary text and as a communication process.

The sura and its subdivisions: A descriptive survey

The sura may be subdivided into five single passages, texts 1 to 5. The first verse, Q. 15:1: *Alif Lam Ra. Those are the signs of the* [*Scripture*] *and of a* [*clear reading*],[19] constitutes a liturgical introduction consisting of a metatextual formula by which the Qur'an comments upon itself. By this means, the introduction qualifies the entire following speech as part of – or as signs (*āyāt*) of – an authorised comprehensive scripture (*kitāb*) and specifies its function as a ceremonial reading or recitation (*qur'ān*).[20] The sender figures indirectly, being represented by his emblems: scripture, signs and pericope. The message is presented simultaneously as immediately enacted speech (*qur'ān*) and speech extended in time and space, since it reproduces a textually fixed source (*āyāt al-kitāb*).[21]

Text 1 (Q. 15:2–15)

Text 1: Consolation interwoven with polemics;[22] debate about the urgent need to cope with an imminent catastrophe.

Q. 15:2–15

2 *Perchance the unbelievers will wish that they had surrendered:*
3 *leave them to eat, and to take their joy, and to be bemused by hope; certainly they will soon know!*

Never a city have We destroyed, but it had a known decree,
and no nation outstrips its term, nor do they put it back.
They say: 'Thou, upon whom the Remembrance is sent down,
thou art assuredly possessed!
Why dost thou not bring the angels unto us, if thou speakest truly?'
We send not down the angels, save with truth;
then they would not be respited.
It is We who have sent down the Remembrance, and We watch over it.
Indeed, We sent Messengers before thee,
among the factions of the ancients,
and not a single Messenger came to them, but they mocked at him;
even so We cause it to enter into the hearts of the sinners –
they believe not in it, though the wont of the ancients is already gone.
Though We opened to them a gate in heaven,
and still they mounted through it,
yet would they say, 'Our eyes have been dazzled; nay,
we are a people bewitched!'

Dramatis personae:
1. sender (we)
2. addressee/transmitter (you)
3. (absent from stage, but commented upon and quoted verbally:) a group of ridiculers

The text, thus ceremonially announced, opens with a lament about the lack of acceptance of the message. The sender admonishes the addressee to separate from those who refuse to accept the message (*alladhīna kafarū*), for in their unrestrained enjoyment of worldly life (*ya'kulū, yatamatta'ū*, Q. 15:3) and their refusal to realise the imminence of the end of time (*ajal*, Q. 15:5) they are building on elusive hope (*amal*, Q. 15:3). They will discern truth, though, through the eschatological catastrophe itself (*ya'lamūn*, Q. 15:3), for the sender, at once Lord of History (*ahlaknā min qaryatin*, Q. 15:4), has set fixed terms for all communities (*kitāb ma'lūm*, Q. 15:4). The refusers, however, insinuate that it is the transmitter (*alladhī nuzzila 'alayhi*, Q. 15:6) who is deluded, claiming that he is possessed by demons and is thus afflicted by a disturbed mind (*majnūn*, Q. 15:6), that he falsely claims to owe his message to superior powers (angels, Q. 15:7–8). Their demand for empirical proof is staunchly rejected by the sender. From Q. 15:11–15, there is the recollection of earlier messengers who were sent and also ridiculed, thus confirming a fixed pattern of stubbornness among the non-believers in taking unambiguous evidence for illusion; the sura even says that should they inspect heaven for

themselves, they would still find a way to dismiss the proof (*sukkirat abṣārunā; bal naḥnu qawmun masḥūrūn*, Q. 15:15).

Text 2 (Q. 15:16–25)

Text 2: Paraenesis on cosmology and intra-cosmic communication.[23]

Q. 15:16–25

We have set in heaven constellations and decked them out fair to the beholders,
and guarded them from every accursed Satan
excepting such as listens by stealth –
and he is pursued by a manifest flame.
And the earth – We stretched it forth, and cast on it firm mountains, and We caused to grow therein of every thing justly weighed,
and there appointed for you livelihood,
and for those you provide not for.
Naught is there, but its treasuries are with Us,
and We send it not down but in a known measure.
And We loose the winds fertilising,
and We send down out of heaven water,
then We give it to you to drink, and you are not its treasurers.
It is We who give life, and make to die,
and it is We who are the inheritors.
We know the ones of you who press forward,
and We know the laggards;
and it is thy Lord shall muster them, and He is All-wise, All-knowing.

Dramatis personae:
1. sender, at the same time the warrant of creation and preservation
2. plurality of listeners, at the same time beneficiaries
3. addressee called upon as a personally addressed witness (*anta* vs. *hum*, Q. 15:25)

This section is a continuation of the debate about the origin of the message which is disassociated from the demonic realm because of the disempowerment of the demons: the heavens are fortified with constellations (*burūj*, Q. 15:16) and protected from the demons who are eager to listen and surreptitiously communicate supernatural knowledge to humans;[24] the communication of such knowledge via demons is thus precluded. Knowledge is reserved for the sender. The earth warrants the preservation of humans according to His premeditated schemes of well-balanced distribution –

everything is justly weighed (*mawzūn*, Q. 15:19) and treasuries are sent down in a known measure (*bi-qadrin maʿlūm*, Q. 15:21). The earth in particular is subdued by the limits He has set in time (Q. 15:23–5): His pre-existing knowledge implies that time is exclusively at His disposition (Q. 15:23). The threatening irreversibility of the decreed end of each community in Q. 15:5 is translated into a positive statement in Q. 15:24, a shift in tone to assure the listeners already convinced (*antum*) of divine providence. Yet the passage ends with a polemic comment on the deniers absent from the scene (*hum*).

Text 3 (Q. 15:26–48)

Text 3: Mythic narration about the heavenly deal concerning man's destiny.[25]

Q. 15:26–48

26 *Surely We created man of a clay of mud moulded,*
27 *and the jinn created We before of fire flaming.*
28 *And when thy Lord said to the angels,*
'See, I am creating a mortal of a clay of mud moulded.
29 *When I have shaped him, and breathed My spirit in him,*
fall you down, bowing before him!'
30 *Then the angels bowed themselves all together,*
31 *save Iblis; he refused to be among those bowing.*
32 *Said He, 'What ails thee, Iblis, that thou art not among those bowing?'*
33 *Said he, 'I would never bow myself before a mortal*
whom Thou hast created of a clay of mud moulded.'
34 *Said He, 'Then go thou forth hence; thou art accursed.*
35 *Upon thee shall rest the curse, till the Day of Doom.'*
36 *Said he, 'My Lord, respite me till the day they shall be raised.'*
37 *Said He, 'Thou art among the ones that are respited*
38 *unto the day of a known time.'*
39 *Said he, 'My Lord, for Thy perverting me*
I shall deck all fair to them in the earth,
and I shall pervert them, all together,
40 *excepting those Thy servants among them that are devoted.'*
41 *Said He, 'This is for Me a straight path:*
42 *over My servants thou shalt have no authority,*
except those that follow thee,
43 *being perverse; Gehenna shall be their Promised Land all together.*
44 *Seven gates it has, and unto each gate a set portion of them belongs.'*
45 *But the godfearing shall be amidst gardens and fountains:*

46 *'Enter you them, in peace and security!'*
47 *We shall strip away all rancour that is in their breasts;*
as brothers they shall be upon couches set face to face;
48 *no fatigue there shall smite them,*
neither shall they ever be driven forth from there.

Dramatis personae in the process of transmission:
1. sender = narrator (*naḥnu/rabbuka*)
2. addressee (*anta*)
3. convinced listeners

Dramatis personae in the narrated interaction:
1. mythic creator
2. obedient servants (angels)
3. antagonist (Iblīs)
4. God-fearing humans of the future (*muttaqīn*)

The story is introduced by a nigh quotation from *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*, Q. 55:14–15, which projects the two groups of men and demons (*jinn*, previously referred to in Q. 15:17 as *shayṭān*) as created from matter of different quality and value. Whereas in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* this difference does not reflect on their status, it is functional in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, which stages the rivalry between man and a particularly prominent figure among the *jinn*, Iblīs, who will return in multiple Qur'anic narratives on the primordial break between God and his creatures. The sender, who enters the stage in the guise of a mythic creator, wishes to install the newly created first man at a particularly high level in the celestial hierarchy which would entitle him to veneration by the angels. He fails, however, to persuade Iblīs to acknowledge man's primacy over the angels and the demons, among whom Iblīs belongs. Though Iblīs' refusal to obey the divine order to prostrate himself before man brings upon him a divine curse, he is temporarily pardoned and conceded an active role: he is allowed to delude humans by disturbing the clarity of their insight (Q. 15:39) and seducing them by means of worldly benefits. The option thus opened to humans to either follow God's guidance or give in to Iblīs' seduction creates a dichotomy which ultimately results in the community's crisis – the rivalry between the faithful believers and the deluded disbelievers. Though it appears as if the creator delegated part of his power over his creatures, surrendering to Iblīs the progeny of the newly created first man, this does not apply universally: He has excluded a privileged group, His 'faithful servants', from that fate. The reference to a collective of servants (*'ibad*), where previously there had only been reference to individual servants (*'abd*), indicates that the listeners have

attained a new identity as a community of believers: those who, shortly after the narration, in Q. 15:49, will be approached as the addressees of a new message. The Meccan community and their opponents alike thus appear to have been conceived as such from as early as pre-existence (i.e. before their creation). The narration not only presents an aetiology for the painful social reality experienced by the listeners, it reassures them of a fair recompense in the hereafter. The sender, in this section, assumes a simultaneous double role in acting as a protagonist in the mythic narration and as a legislator in the address to the community; thus, his speech within a dialogue in the primordial story is able to merge with his annunciation of eschatological reward to the community in the present.

Text 4 (Q. 15:49–84)

Text 4: Narration from salvation history.[26]

Q. 15:49–84

49 *Tell My servants I am the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate,*
50 *and that My chastisement is the painful chastisement.*
51 *And tell them of the guests of Abraham,*
52 *when they entered unto him, saying, 'Peace!'*
He said, 'Behold, we are afraid of you.'
53 *They said, 'Be not afraid; behold,*
we give thee good tidings of a cunning boy.'
54 *He said, 'What, do you give me good tidings,*
though old age has smitten me?
Of what do you give me good tidings?'
55 *They said, 'We give thee good tidings of truth.*
Be not of those that despair.'
56 *He said, 'And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord,*
excepting those that are astray?'
57 *He said, 'And what is your business, envoys?'*
58 *They said, 'We have been sent unto a people of sinners,*
59 *excepting the folk of Lot; them we shall deliver all together,*
60 *excepting his wife –*
we have decreed, she shall surely be of those that tarry.'
61 *So, when the envoys came to the folk of Lot,*
62 *he said, 'Surely you are a people unknown to me!'*
63 *They said, 'Nay, but we have brought thee*
that concerning which they were doubting.
64 *We have come to thee with the truth, and assuredly we speak truly.*

65 *So set forth, thou with thy family, in a watch of the night,*
and follow after the backs of them,
and let not any one of you turn round;
and depart unto the place you are commanded.'
66 *And We decreed for him that commandment,*
that the last remnant of those should be cut off in the morning.
67 *And the people of the city came rejoicing.*
68 *He said, 'These are my guests; put me not to shame,*
69 *and fear God, and do not degrade me.'*
70 *They said, 'Have we not forbidden thee all beings?'*
71 *He said, 'These are my daughters, if you would be doing.'*
72 *By thy life, they wandered blindly in their dazzlement,*
73 *and the Cry seized them at the sunrise,*
74 *and We turned it uppermost nethermost*
and rained on it stones of baked clay.
75 *Surely in that are signs for such as mark;*
76 *surely it is on a way yet remaining;*
77 *surely in that is a sign for believers.*
78 *Certainly the dwellers in the Thicket were evildoers,*
79 *and We took vengeance on them.*
The two of them were upon a roadway manifest.
80 *The dwellers in El-Hijr cried lies to the Envoys.*
81 *We brought them Our signs, and they turned away from them.*
82 *They were hewing the mountains into houses,*
therein dwelling securely;
83 *and the Cry seized them in the morning;*
84 *that they earned did not avail them.*

Dramatis personae in the process of transmission:

1. sender
2. addressee/transmitter
3. community (*ʿibād*)

Dramatis personae in the narrated interaction:

1. narrator (= sender, whose speech directly ends up in that of the messengers)
2. anonymous, apparently superhuman messengers
3. Abraham
4. Lot
5. people of Lot and, later on, the dwellers of the thicket, and the dwellers of al-Ḥijr

The narration, which makes up the middle part of the sura, is introduced with a double metatextual formula: the instigation to proclaim to the community God's conflicting attitudes of mercy and severe justice – matching the Rabbinic concepts *middat ha-hesed* (mercy) and *middat ha-din* (justice) – and the announcement of a narrative commissioned to be read to the community (*ʿibādī*) through an explicit instruction by the sender. This narrative, already foreshadowed in the opening of the sura (Q. 15:1) which promised a reading from scripture, is a retelling of the Biblical story, from Genesis 18:1–26, whose sequence of events has been retained. Its objective is, however, paraenetic in that it strongly urges man to have faith in God and follow the right path. It achieves this by exemplifying the divergent divine responses to man – of kindness, should he adhere to the path, and of severe punishment, should he diverge from it – thus translating the agreement that God had arranged with Iblīs in pre-existence into eschatological terms. The two stories of Abraham and his angelic guests, and of the people of Lot respectively present both examples of man's response to the divine offer of guidance.

The narrated plot, again, merges into metatextual appeals to a plurality of listeners, urging them to use their reason (Q. 15:75–7) to decipher for themselves the signs in the narration, which are even implied to pose a kind of riddle.[27] They are encouraged to follow the example of Abraham, to persevere in trusting in God's providence. The narration of the two options – divine grace or divine retribution – is extended by the inclusion of additional negative examples which end with a statement that even well-established (Q. 15:82) and prosperous communities will not be spared punishment (Q. 15:84). Thus the anticipation aroused in Q. 15:49–50 by the metatextual announcement that a 'text within the text' – a pericope about mercy (*raḥma*) and punishment (*ʿadhāb*) – is to be read before the community has been fulfilled.

Text 5 (Q. 15:85–99)

Text 5: Consolation of the addressee through the affirmation of the continuance of communication.

Q. 15:85–99

85 *We created not the heavens and the earth,*
and all that is between them, save in truth.
Surely the Hour is coming;
so pardon thou, with a gracious pardoning.
86 *Surely thy Lord, He is the All-creator, the All-knowing.*

87 *We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated,*
and the mighty Qur'an.
88 *Stretch not thine eyes to that We have given [groups] of them to enjoy;*
and do not sorrow for them, and lower thy wing unto the believers,
89 *and say, 'Surely, I am the manifest warner.'*
90 *So We sent it down to the partitioners,*
91 *who have broken the Qur'an into fragments.*
92 *Now by thy Lord, We shall surely question them all together*
93 *concerning that they were doing.*
94 *So shout that thou art commanded*
and turn thou away from the idolaters.
95 *We suffice thee against the mockers,*
96 *even against those who set up with God another god.*
Certainly they will soon know!
97 *We know indeed thy breast is straitened by the things they say.*
98 *Proclaim thy Lord's praise, and be of those that bow,*
99 *and serve thy Lord, until the Certain comes to thee.*

Dramatis personae:
1. sender
2. addressee

In the final section of the sura, which is introduced by an emphatic introductory formula, the addressee is reassured by both the affirmation of the eschatological truth and the reminder that he is now in possession of two batches of divine communication:[28] a sizeable number of pericopes and a further corpus which is enigmatically described as the seven oft-repeated (Q. 15:87). He is advised to turn away from the deniers, following the example of Lot who turned away from his sinful city. He is encouraged to devote himself to liturgical services, following the positive example of the angels,[29] not the negative example of Iblīs who refused to prostrate himself.[30] The sura closes with the instruction to continue the communication with the sender until the definite clarification comes.

The literary composition of the sura and the textual coherence of its heterogeneous parts

A purely descriptive reading of the sura already reveals the striking heterogeneity of its individual parts. It contains different sorts of texts: consolations, paraenetical recollections, mythic narrations and narrations from Biblical salvation history. These elements would hardly form a convincing

ensemble were it not for Qur'anic referentiality, a device which forcefully re-establishes coherence. On the one hand, central ideas are reiterated, such as the concept of the delusion of enjoyment in worldly life (*matāʿ*) which is found in text 1 (Q. 15:3) and text 5 (Q. 15:88);[31] or the idea, equally found in text 1 (Q. 15:1) and text 5 (Q. 15:96), of insight (*ʿilm*) dawning too late.[32] In another case, it is a grave incident in the community's social life: the insinuation in text 1 (Q. 15:6) that a demon is the transmitter of the message occurs again in the context of a consolation in text 5 (Q. 15:97);[33] or the painful experience of the debasement of messengers (*istihzāʾ*), which appears to follow a fixed pattern that binds text 1 (Q. 15:11) to text 5 (Q. 15:95–6).[34] On the other hand, a past event may be recollected to encourage a mimesis in the present: the recollection of the prostration (*sajda*) practised in pre-existence by the angels in text 3 (Q. 15:29–33) encourages the same action in the present from the addressee in text 5 (Q. 15:98); or the segregation from the opponents, which God, in the past, commanded (*amr*) of Lot in text 4 (Q. 15:65) is resumed in the present by the addressee in text 5 (Q. 15:94). Finally, a key concept, *ʿibād*, established in text 3 (Q. 15:40) can even acquire the function of a mythic foundation for the social conditions of the community in the present in text 4 (Q. 15:49).

Of still greater significance for imbuing the sura with coherence is one particular sequence of arguments, which, indeed, forms a *leitmotiv* (i.e. a recurrent theme) throughout this composition.[35] This sequence of arguments, which bridges all the partial texts, translates the concept of belief/disbelief into a problem of the acuteness of human perception: the disbelievers regard truth as a delusion resulting from a disturbance of the mind. They cling to elusive hope (text 1), they have been deluded – as resolved from the mythic account of creation (text 3) – by Iblīs who, in turn, had been deluded and thus creates disturbance and delusion in accordance with the agreement he made with God in pre-existence. Accordingly, the people of Lot act out of a disturbance of mind, and thus delusion (text 4); still, clarity will prevail in the end (text 5). *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* thus appears as a compact composition whose coherence is warranted by multiple instances of referentiality.

Text-referentiality as a Characteristic of the Communicational Structure of the Qur'an

Preliminary remarks

The efficacy of this kind of referentiality, however, is in no way confined to the literary function of knitting together the different elements of the sura. It

functions, importantly, as a medium to integrate the listeners into the communication. By no means does referentiality always explicitly refer to ideas already previously stated; on the contrary, it is often left to the listeners to connect the referent with the signified, as becomes apparent from the appeals urging the listeners to think about what they had just heard.[36] Since we are confronted with a debate about a novel, eschatologically determined concept of time, it is not surprising that the present is dismissed as insignificant, and the past and the eschatological future are reflected as being paramount. Here, the past is understood as salvation history, which provides exempla for the ongoing argument,[37] or as the mythic past bearing an impact on the worldview of the listeners.[38] Whenever the issue of the present reality of the transmitter is raised, it is done with reference to what has already been said in the text, as noted in the earlier examples of referentiality within the various parts of the sura. More than once, the text is mirrored in a metatext (i.e. a reflection on the text), such as the recollection of previous refusals to accept the message or by the triumphal statement that the text communicated to the transmitter has already grown to constitute a corpus.[39] The spatial and temporal realm outside the text, where believing and opponent listeners could still meet and communicate, is glimpsed only rarely, and in those cases exclusively under a negative, indeed condemning, aspect.[40]

Thus, a new 'world of converts' emerges which deserves the qualification of a 'textual world',[41] since it is a world which draws on textual rather than real life testimonies. It is a world counter to the reality inhabited by those not prepared to convert, where enjoyment, eating and thoughtlessness attest the elusive confidence in its stability. The textual world is conditioned by the extreme pressure of tense temporal constraints; its herald is, moreover, pressed under a weighty covenant tying him to the sender of the message. It is a world beleaguered by powerful opponents appearing as ridiculers or at least as deniers.

What strategies does the beleaguered text use to assert itself, in spite of its incompatibility with the still triumphant and seemingly untroubled world that does without a constraining textual superstructure? In *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* we are witness to a debate, the explicit part of which (i.e. the sender's message) presents itself as the communication of signs (*āyāt*), as an impulse for and an appeal to the listeners to reorient themselves.

Metatextual references to the genesis of a scripture in progress

Let us look at the metatexual parts of the sura. The sura identifies itself in its introductory verse as a set of signs (*āyāt*) from a pre-existing, more extensive text – as an excerpt from the scripture (*al-kitāb*). Such a scripture, obviously

perceived by the listeners as being unchangeable and comprehensive, presupposes that a stream of tradition has come to a standstill;[42] it has become frozen to constitute a store of warranted knowledge. Qur'anic reference to scripture, therefore, presupposes a certain extent of signs existing in a fixed form and dispatched by the sender in portions (individual *āyāt*) to be integrated into neatly composed pericopes – '*qur'ān*'. Q. 15:1 announces such a new individual pericope, which follows in the shape of the ensuing text. In text 5, at Q. 15:87, the sura returns again to the text form of *qur'ān*,[43] which now appears in the grammatically determined form as *al-qur'ān,* thus referring to the entire genre of recitation texts or to the already existing mass of such pericopes. Here, the transmitter is reminded that he is now in possession of significant portions of a mighty corpus of pericopes, the mighty lectionary (*al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm*). What does this portion of text look like, judged from the vantage point of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*? The question is complex and can be answered in terms of quantity as well as quality.

Let us turn to the latter aspect first: how does the *qur'ān*, claimed to be accessible to the proclaimer and his listeners in Q. 15:87, manifest itself? What is it that the transmitter has been credited with to prove that he was addressed by a superhuman speaker?

Qualitative aspects of '*al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm*' (Q. 15:87)

Qur'an code as a medium to defamiliarise customary perception

We follow Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd in stating that the Qur'an is a coded text,[44] that is, a text that responds, through the code underlying its form, to the historically and culturally conditioned capacities of its first receiver and the public directly addressed by him. Since the message is meant to be understood by them, its linguistic system (*niẓām lughawī*) should be tailored to fit the addressees. How does the Qur'anic text assert its set of signs, its referents to a textual world, over the rivalling set of signs referring to a real world and thus displaying dynamics that move towards widely different ends?

Presupposing that Qur'anic texts are not primarily meant as messages directed solely towards the person addressed as 'you', but are, rather, new interpretations of the world to be reflected upon again and again by a plurality of receivers, and thus clad in the form of literary texts,[45] we have to inquire about the expectations of these listeners. How to come closer to a listener's response? We are confronted in the Qur'an, we have to remember, with a text generated by an extraordinary communication process: in Abū Zayd's terminology – adopted from the Qur'an itself – by *waḥy*, usually translated as 'revelation', but more literally meaning 'suggestion' or 'inspiration'. The text

form resulting from *waḥy* is characterised by the fact that it appears enigmatic, not accessible to the outsider, but only to the addressee who is endowed with the capacity to 'translate' it to others. However, even once this work of 'translation' has been carried out and the message communicated through *waḥy* has received a linguistically clear form, the text retains a code distinguishing it from all other texts of its time. The suras, particularly the early ones that introduce the new message for the first time, must have shocked their listeners in view of the extreme demand implied in the Qur'anic communication, which is nothing less than the renunciation of an existing consensus, their new code being intended to extinguish a familiar old code. Abū Zayd stressed that Qur'anic speech creates a code of itself, which reconstructs in a new way the elements of the original system of meaning.[46] In fact, familiar social interaction becomes reinterpreted: it is extended to accommodate a new mythic participant, hierarchically more elevated, who plays the role of a 'stage director'. Not only is the message apt for modifying the familiar vision of social interaction substantially, but through its mode of communication it emerges as the speech of a transcendent sender.

The language of the Qur'an, then, is one which calls familiar understanding into question instead of adapting itself seamlessly into the understanding held by the listeners. Already, in text 1, this codation is strikingly evident. Thus, the analytical term '*alladhīna kafarū*' (Q. 15:2) serves to defamiliarise a circle of persons well known individually; equally, the formula '*alladhī nuzzila 'alayhi'l-dhikru*' (Q. 15:6) in the reproduction of the opponents' ridiculing polemics comes to replace the individual addressing of a figure who is well known to them by name. Both these oblique references are understandable as a means of codation of a world whose real processes and interrelations are dismissed as irrelevant compared to the scenario of the newly implemented textual world and whose individuality is therefore considered insignificant, thus allowing for its signs to be blurred. The place of a scenario of interaction informed by reality has been taken over by a scenario of interaction informed by texts. The peculiarly Qur'anic style based on the use of *clausula*s, which will emerge later but is already foreshadowed in this text (e.g. *inna fī dhālika la-āyātin li'l-mutawassimīn*, Q. 15:75), highlights the most powerful device for de-individualising facts.[47] However, the issue is in no way limited to formal matters. Semantic key terms, as well, attest to a radical reinterpretation of familiar reality, such as the classification of those who submit to the divine demand to render account of themselves as *muslimīn* (Q. 15:2); or the imposition of a *kitāb ma'lūm* (Q. 15:4), a term for a divine decree fixed by writing; or the notion of a time span granted to the community collectively,

ajal (Q. 15:5); or the concept of an ultimate eschatologically informed truth, *al-ḥaqq* (Q. 15:8).

Such key terms have been proved by Toshihiko Izutsu, Mohammed Arkoun and Abū Zayd as basic elements of the Qur'anic discourse. However, since we are concerned with textual strategies, it is not the system they constitute on the macrostructural level that is of interest but their being anchored – tightly or loosely – in the communication process itself. We may assume that *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* appeared to the listeners to be a fairly novel form of communication with a linguistic code that was unfamiliar to them. It is not irrelevant, then, that the terms '*muslimūn*' and '*ajal*' as well as the word '*kitāb*' in the sense of a decree in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* appeared for the first time, and that '*al-ḥaqq*' with its eschatological connotation was still relatively unfamiliar, having appeared in no more than two older suras.

Qur'an code as a medium to defamiliarise the coordinates of space and time

The re-encoding of a reality that was dismissed as insignificant into terms of a durable, eschatologically informed textual world was thus progressing, provoking irritation in the listeners still bound to worldly life. This applies in particular to the reinterpretation of the world in terms of space and time. The world inhabited by men and demons now appears isolated from the heavens (which is reserved for the divine entourage) by barriers which can no longer be overcome by demons[48] – who used to provide their protégés, the poets and soothsayers with superhuman knowledge – but exclusively by angelic intermediaries, whose crucial function concerning humankind will be fulfilled at the end of time (see Q. 69:17). The scenario of the textual world thus supersedes a traditional vision; the irritation of those listeners who still do not believe is clearly reflected in the provocative demand they make of the transmitter to present to them those angelic beings responsible for his inspiration,[49] so as to prove his sincerity. The rejection of such a control to be imposed upon the textual world by the rules of the real world, again, relies on texts: a previously presented Qur'anic passage, Q. 89:22, is evoked, which speaks of the eschatological function carried out by the angels which will affect every man and thus eventually also fulfil the provocative demand.

Not only has a cosmic and spatial extension of the image of the world taken place, but the new textual world has broadened the horizon in terms of time as well, primarily, but not solely, through introducing the new eschatological vantage point of the future. In *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* a mythic past is introduced in narrative form for the first time; it presents the creator in pre-existence delegating particular power to a creature of His. The narrative is not told from an abstract aetiological perspective, but serves to explain the social situation

that exists in the present: it culminates in the vision of an elect community (*'ibād*), and the abandonment to the seducer of the unconvinced adherents of worldly life. This projection of present developments (already associated with their eschatological retribution) onto the mythic past succeeds in imprinting the empirically observable situation with the character of a timeless necessity.

No less does the narrative about the dispatch of messengers, which translates the vision of an all-comprehensive scripture (the source of the salvation historical accounts) into a Qur'anic manifestation, open up a novel discourse; it is one of the first fully fledged narratives in the Qur'an.[50] It leads back into a remote past antedating the events known to the listeners from local ancestral tradition.[51] Still, with its account of the messengers sent to reassure Abraham and Lot, it is meant to serve as a mirror for the present: the badly harassed just in the Lot story are the typological forebears of the addressee and his listeners who had been surprised by a communication from the textual world which now renders their subsistence in their surroundings most problematic. This story with its mirror effect is marked by introductory formulas indicating that it was destined to be a liturgical reading given before an emerging community, that is, before those mirrored in the narrative themselves, a phenomenon until then unique in the Qur'an.

To sum up the observations about the quality of what was termed *qur'ān* in Q. 15:87, we are confronted – as was already underlined by Abū Zayd – less with a mass of texts than with a particular code which takes familiar reality and converts it into a symbol of the more authentic counter-form, the textual world, thereby making the latter more comprehensible.[52] This Qur'anic code does not, however, draw primarily on the collective memory shared by the receiver and the rest of the Meccans, but on a different memory warranted by the celestial scripture, *al-kitāb*, which was shared, to some extent, by the recipients and the earlier figures of salvation history. Still, the Qur'an does refer – if even with a defamiliarising intention – to Meccan reality. It does not evaporate into a space exclusively filled by Biblical reminiscences. One might therefore speak of text referentiality – or textuality – dominating, but not expunging the *Sitz im Leben* of the Qur'an.[53] Both worlds – the reality inhabited by the majority who are focused on the enjoyment of the present, and the vision of an apocalyptic time disturbed by eschatological tension, as shared by the addressee and his adherents – relate to each other in such a radically contrary way that they appear to exclude each other. They are presented as two unequally successful readings, as two unequally acute realisations of one and the same indisputable truth which some, the clear-sighted, are able to discern, whereas the others are only able to perceive in a

distorted way until the event of the catastrophe which will make their sight acute.

Thus, according to the Qur'an, both codes for reading reality do not differ as much in the psychological preconditions or the inclinations of their adherents as in the different degrees of exactness. The Qur'anic code is a medium for discerning reality more acutely.

Quantitative aspects of '*al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm*' (Q. 15:87)

We now briefly turn to the question of what could be intended materially by the expression '*al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm*', what number of texts it alludes to. Obviously, the novel code, the vision of a textual world, did not manifest itself for the first time in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*. The triumphal statement *We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated, and the mighty Qur'an* (*Innā ātaynāka sab'an mina'l-mathānī wa'l-qur'āna'l-'aẓīm*, Q. 15:87) is made in a phase of development when a host of images, of new conceptual coinages, of figures of thought, indeed, a complete textual world, has already emerged that enabled the addressee to evoke intensive echoes with every new pronunciation. How is this echo effect to be traced? There is hardly an alternative to registering all those verses presenting parallels to a particular verse in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* in terms of content or argument, of the codation of persons or figures of thought, that can be traced in older suras (i.e. those suras that display the stylistic features of early close-knit, *saj'*-informed Qur'anic texts). Considering all the material that bears a relation of the above-mentioned kinds to individual verses of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, one would have to list the following thirty-two suras – Q. 111, Q. 109, Q. 106, Q. 105, Q. 96, Q. 94, Q. 89, Q. 88, Q. 87, Q. 86, Q. 85, Q. 84, Q. 83, Q. 81, Q. 80, Q. 78, Q. 77, Q. 75, Q. 74, Q. 73, Q. 70, Q. 69, Q. 68, Q. 65, Q. 56, Q. 55, Q. 54, Q. 53, Q. 52, Q. 51, Q. 50 and Q. 37 – all of which contain at least one verse, but more often several verses, that, in view of their close lexical, phraseological or blatant semantic similarity, appear to be echoed in individual verses of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*. In particular, *Sūrat al-Ṭūr*, *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt* and *Sūrat Qāf*, share identical verses with *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* and, so, should be regarded as being closely related to our text.

The problem of the nucleus of the emerging canon

Though there is no stringent proof that this particular partial corpus of thirty-two suras was a background for *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, the construction nevertheless suggests that this is plausible. Let us return to the model mentioned earlier of the canonical process as a continuous growth of a text corpus from a nucleus. It is evident that *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* presents a continuation of previous texts, of which we may mention the most striking examples. It unfolds the story of

Abraham and Lot, which was related as a monopartite story in *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt*, as a bipartite account that quotes from the previous version. Furthermore, *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* develops the idea of the twofold creation of both men and demons which was proclaimed in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* as a short manifesto; through the unfolding of the Iblīs myth, *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* transforms it into a fully fledged narrative. In addition, individual verses clearly refer to an existing text nucleus beyond their sura. Thus, Q. 15:74, which mentions an event of collective annihilation known from the local Meccan history, presupposes knowledge of *Sūrat al-Fīl*; it even prods the listeners to draw on that knowledge by appealing to their acuteness (*mutawassimīn*, Q. 15:75), and thus cajoling them to establish the relation to that text themselves. In the story of Abraham, the protagonist's fear before the angelic guests relies again on the explanation given in the earlier version of the story in *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt*, where Abraham's fright at his encounter with super-human messengers is dwelt on. Other verses become unambiguous only when related to an explicit statement in a previous sura, such as Q. 15:2, where the eschatological dimension becomes clear only through the more explicit Q. 51:60: *So woe to the unbelievers, for that day of theirs that they are promised* (*fa-waylun li'lladhīna kafarū min yawmihumu'lladhī yū'adūn*). Equally, the abstract menace in Q. 15:3: *leave them to eat, and to take their joy, and to be bemused by hope; certainly they will soon know!* (*dharhum ya'kulū wa yatamatta'ū wa yulhihimu'l-amalu fa-sawfa ya'lamūn*) relies on knowledge of Q. 70:42: *Then leave them alone to plunge and play until they encounter that day of theirs which they are promised* (*fa-dharhum yakhūḍū wa yal'abū ḥattā yulāqū yawmahumu'lladhī yū'adūn*) and an almost similar expression in Q. 52:45: *Then leave them, till they encounter their day wherein they shall be thunderstruck* (*fa-dharhum ḥattā yulāqū yawmahumu'lladhī fīhi yuṣ'aqūn*).

The central elements of the new code become clearly discernible only against this background. The all-encompassing celestial scripture in Q. 15:1 appears as the source of the Qur'anic pericopes; it had already been identified as such in Q. 56:78–9: *in a hidden* [*Scripture*]*/none but the purified shall touch* (*innahu la-qur'ānun karīm; fī kitābin maknūn*), though nowhere else in the early suras. Heavenly writings figuring in earlier suras consisted, rather, of registers of human deeds: Q. 83:7–10: *the Book of the libertines is in Sijjin/and what shall teach thee what is Sijjin?/A book inscribed/Woe that day unto those who cry it lies* (*kallā inna kitāba'l-fujjāri la-fī sijjīn; wa mā adrāka mā sijjīn; kitābun marqūm*), and similarly Q. 83:20 and Q. 52:2 (*A book inscribed*); a hypothetical, terrestrial document was mentioned in reference to an instance of self-legitimation in a current dispute in Q. 68:37: *Or have you a Book wherein you study?* (*am lakum kitābun fīhi tadrusūn*).[54] As for the use of '*qur'ān*' in the

sense of a pericope to be recited, there were only two occurrences of this before *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* – Q. 85:21–2: *Nay, but it is a glorious reading;* [*from a text*] *in a guarded tablet* (*bal huwa qur'ānun majīd; fī lawḥin maḥfūẓ*) and Q. 56:77–8: *it is surely a noble Qur'an/in a hidden* [*Scripture*] (*innahu la-qur'ānun karīm; fī kitābin maknūn*). The rest of the early suras associate the term '*qur'ān*' with the process of recitation rather than with the text itself.[55] Our sura thus sheds new light on the scripture as the source on which the new textual world draws, and on the Qur'anic pericope as an excerpt from that scripture put at the disposal of the recipients.[56]

In comparison to that, the insinuation of mental disturbance (*junūn*) appears to have been put forward more frequently in previous suras,[57] as was the accusation of being deluded, charmed.[58] The concept of a community (*'ibādī*), however, is altogether new; its cosmogonic aetiology attests its significance. Several arguments from *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* – concerning the position of a single Qur'anic pericope in the process of revelation, for example, or the conclusions to be drawn from the ever-worsening social constraints of the community, as reflected in the structure of the communal service – are taken up again in the later suras, *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* and *Sūrat al-Isrā'*.[59] *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* thus marks an important stage in the canonical process, not only betraying an organic growth out of the nucleus of preceding texts but beginning the intratextual discussion about that process of growth. It is a text no longer anchored in everyday reality, but in a textual world which relies on the newly established hermeneutic fact of the Qur'anic code.

Emerging canon and emerging cult: Communicational and liturgical coherence among the individual texts

Having proposed this model as a vantage point for Qur'anic investigations in general, the question of how to trace the growth of the nucleus through the individual suras now arises. It has to be demonstrated that the suras, with their reiterated patterns, do not constitute mere repetitions, but, rather, build upon each other, their elements proving functional in creating ever new ensembles with new focuses of meaning. What is the particular focus of each sura, specifically, in our case, of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*?

Since the literary style of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* allows us to situate the text after a number of suras which are discernibly older and before a number of others which are obviously dependent on *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* and thus later, a certain control of the familiarity or lack of familiarity of the recurring elements as to their character as repetitions or as innovations becomes possible. It was argued that the mythic account of the distribution of power in pre-existence was represented in this sura for the first time, as was the account about the dispatch

of messengers which focused on the harassed, just forebears of the Meccan community. In addition, the concept of a comprehensive scripture from which all the Qur'anic pericopes stemmed was shown to have become more cemented. A number of important issues are new then. Why do they merge in this particular sura? I would venture to answer that this is because a new discourse had emerged which raised the sura to the rank of a remarkable identity document of a charismatic leader and his adherents[60] – a status which is due, it seems, to its emergence from a particularly significant phase in the general development of the Qur'anic event.

The expression *'ibādī* (my servants, my community) appears to be the keyword here. It emerges – if one leaves aside a passage in *Sūrat al-Fajr* (*Enter thou among My servants*, Q. 89:29), which is presumably a later addition[61] – as a new term organically adjusted to the code of the textual world: the servants are directly assigned to the sender (as expressed through the possessive suffix), thus entering a relation analogous to that between the addressee and the sender which is ever-reaffirmed through the self-manifestation of the latter as *rabbuka*. The term *'ibādī* appears for the first time in the creation myth of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, which projects the division of created beings – as either adherents of the creator or adherents of the seducer – back into pre-existence. Though the myth is retold in several later suras, only here does it function to affirm that the community of the present was conceived and elected before creation. The notion of the community in its full sense, not only as a group of adherents of a charismatic leader but as participants in one and the same cult, is affirmed immediately by the ensuing instruction given to the addressee, to recite to them (i.e. the *'ibād*) an exemplum. This is a story about their spiritual forebears, a group of just people who were harassed in the past and were given the option of accepting or rejecting the divine authority. The entire sura may be thought of as an appraisal of the emerging community. Having been conceived as a community in pre-existence (text 3), the *'ibād* are mirrored in an account from salvation history (text 4) and are thus affirmed in the option they have chosen. At the same time, their suffering (text 1 and text 5) is filled with meaning, attesting their succession to their forerunners. The community, which had been conceived within the cosmogonic process, has now taken concrete shape.

The sura as an enactment of the liturgy

In this sura, the emphasis placed on the idea of a community seems to point to a new consciousness. There is more to affirm this impression: not only does the cosmic foundation of a community of faithful believers (*mukhlaṣūn*) occupy the central part of the sura, but the sura also translates the cultic

dimension of that social development into theatrical terms. Indeed, the sura may be read as an enactment of a service. It is opened by a liturgical introductory formula which both affirms the ensuing speech as an excerpt from (heavenly) scripture and destines it for a festive recitation (Q. 15:1), thus raising it to a ceremonial level. The formula takes the place that an introductory hymn would have in Jewish and Christian services. What follows is an exchange between the sender and the addressee. Though the sender's consoling address is not explicitly responded to, the listeners will not fail to realise that it refers to concerns of the addressee; it thus gives the impression of a dialogue. In extra-Qur'anic monotheistic services, this bipolar communication would equate to an ectenia (i.e. the responsorium between the community and deacon or priest) which conveys prayers to the divine addressee who is assumed to be present though not speaking. Although in the Qur'anic case this part is not a prayer, it still mirrors, in the divine speaker's response to the unspoken pleas of the transmitter, the hardships and needs of the community. The centre of the sura is occupied by two accounts from the store of knowledge of salvation history. Both accounts retelling Biblical or apocryphal stories would have satisfied the monotheistic worshippers who would have expected the central part of a service to be occupied by the reading of scriptural texts, as was customary in the services of the other monotheistic religions. A further exhortation closely related to the first, and merging into a closing exhortation of the addressee, would have a counterpart in the closing responsorium of a monotheistic service,[62] though again with exchanged roles since the divine partner in the Qur'an is not the addressee but the speaker. Judging from the physical absence of the opponents from among those addressed in the text, it can be deduced that this performance would have taken place in a space reserved for the community and no longer in the public space in the vicinity of the Kaaba, where their opponents' cultic ceremonies would also have taken place. Thus, it appears that *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* reflects a new cultic situation in which the form of the liturgical service closely resembled that of the other monotheistic communities.

Reminiscences of the *Fātiḥa* as the fulfilment of the annunciation of the seven oft-repeated verses (*sabʿ min al-mathānī*) mentioned in Q. 15:87

A monotheistic service is, of course, by no means completely represented through the elements that were found reflected in the structure of the sura. What is missing, in particular, are liturgical contributions pronounced by the community itself, such as a profession of faith and prayer. These observations bring us back to the triumphant statement about the proclaimer's breakthrough in his mission to communicate the textual world that was made in Q. 15:87:

We have given thee seven of the oft-repeated, and the mighty Qur'an [*the lectionary*] (*innā ātaynāka sabʿan mina'l-mathānī wa'l-qur'āna'l-ʿaẓīm*), whose first element, the veiled, enigmatic text, has not yet been given due attention. It is worth recalling here some of the arguments presented in chapter 6 ('*Fātiḥa*') indicating that the *sabʿ mina'l-mathānī* refers to the 'seven oft-repeated verses' of the *Fātiḥa*[63] – an interpretation already held by a major group of classical exegetes. The *Fātiḥa*, also known in the pre-redactional context as '*al-Ḥamd*', lurks in our text in more than one passage; indeed, it constitutes a kind of subtext.

Individual parts of the *Fātiḥā* seem to be dispersed over the entire sura. The old name *al-Ḥamd*, the first word of the text of the *Fātiḥa*, is echoed in the closing exhortation of the recipients to perform worship, Q. 15:98: *Proclaim thy Lord's praise* (*fa-sabbiḥ bi-ḥamdi rabbika*). If it wasn't known that it alludes to the name of a prayer, this exhortation would sound tautological, which it does in two earlier occurrences closely related to *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*: Q. 50:39 and Q. 52:48. In each of these instances, *al-Ḥamd* is evoked at the end of the sura, its placement suggesting its function of announcing an ensuing recitation of the prayer. The *Fātiḥa*'s essential function as a communal prayer accompanying the ritual performances, the prostrations (*sujūd*), of the service, is evoked in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* in diverse passages that raise the issue of prostration; for example, in Q. 15:29–33 and Q. 15:98.

The second verse of the *Fātiḥa* is evoked in Q. 15:70, where the apparently anonymous persons are termed *ʿālamīn*. This is an unusual use of the lexeme which, otherwise, mostly appears in the formulaic combination of *rabb al-ʿālamīn*: previous to *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* it occurs only twice in the non-formulaic phrase *dhikrun li'l-ʿālamīn* (*a Reminder unto* [*the Worlds*]) in Q. 68:52 and Q. 81:27; and three times as *rabbu'l-ʿālamīn* (*Lord of* [*the Worlds*]) in Q. 83:6, Q. 81:29 and Q. 69:43. The predicate '*al-raḥīm*' from Q. 1:3 reappears, presumably for the first time,[64] in Q. 15:49. Remarkably, the Day of Judgement (*yawm al-dīn*), from Q. 1:4, was dwelt upon no less than eight times before appearing in Q. 15:35. Derivatives from *ʿ-b-d* (see *naʿbudu*, Q. 1:5) had already been used in *Sūrat al-Kāfirūn* (Q. 109) and *Sūrat Quraysh*, both focusing on the Kaaba worship; in Q. 15:99 the form *fa-ʿbud*, in the sense of a personal adoration, functions prominently as the closing imperative of the sura. Q. 1:6: *the straight path* (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) reappears for the second time, after Q. 67:22, in Q. 15:41, in the creator's affirmation of Iblīs' claim: '*This is for Me a straight path*' (*hādhā sirāṭun ʿalayya mustaqīm*). Q. 1:7: *those who are astray* (*al-ḍāllīn*) is evoked in Q. 15:56, where Abraham defies the predicate of *ḍāll*. Thus, apart from the *basmala*, all the verses of the *Fātiḥa* are reflected in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* through at least one lexeme or phrase.

The reference to the two tokens of confidence received by the addressee from the superhuman sender – the mighty *qur'ān* and the seven oft-repeated verses – resounds the triumphal assertion that the recipients have reached a substantially new self-awareness. In the case of *al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, the significance of this new development manifests itself in the efficiency of the communication that has been made possible through the new code, that is, the new reading of reality which has been accepted by the emerging community. As demonstrated in the summary comparison of our sura with several older ones, the concept of a cultic group of adherents of the speaker was new, as was the notion that a comprehensive scripture was the source of the Qur'an pericopes. Indeed, both belong together: text-referentiality, in which it is assumed that a text corpus is the primary point of reference, can only replace reality oriented referentiality if it is assisted and maintained by a circle of fellow converts. These, again, require a powerful collective self-expression. The *Fātiḥa* attests the believers' awareness of being bound to the textual world, of acting in a scenario that includes among its dramatis personae the divine actor as an omnipotent and ubiquitous stage director.

Through multiple devices – through the Qur'an code re-coining reality and the resounding of the strongly text-referential self-articulation of the community in the *Fātiḥa* – *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* proves to be uniquely connected with the process of the emergence of a community. The sura reflects that process on three levels: in the cosmogonic and salvation historical topics treated in its central parts, in its structure mirroring a monotheistic service and in its intertextuality, that is, the instances of interspersed reminiscences of the *Fātiḥa*. It can thus be justly claimed that the text is situated in the very heart of a growing canon.

The Double Dimension of the Qur'an as a Literary Text and as a Communication: Conclusions for Qur'anic Scholarship

Two complementary approaches have been applied to *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*. First, the sura has been surveyed as a literary text, a step that led to the discovery of a mass of regular features warranting a close-knit composition. In the case of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, this composition clearly betrays an aesthetic objective; in Abū Zayd's terms, it attests the efficient translation of *waḥy* by the transmitter. Now, such an observation would, in Abū Zayd's macrostructural view, hold true for text units other than the sura as well. In insisting on the sura, we consciously transcend Abū Zayd's frame. Only by accepting that the sura was an intended unit can we embark on the second step, the inquiry into the sura's context, by cautiously tracing its textual referentiality, that is, its links to other

Qur'anic texts and, thus, to earlier stages of the Qur'anic proclamation. This step can be dispensed with if – like the structuralist, the semiological or form-critical approaches – the unit of the sura is not credited with literary and thus historical significance, but regarded as a merely technical device to divide the text into portions. Only when acknowledging the suras heuristically as individual pericopes (*qur'ān*) of the Qur'an (i.e. as speech units that develop around a particular focus and produce a particular tension through the arrangement of diverse motifs and stereotypical elements), only when acknowledging the suras as liturgical texts with the power to arouse the remembrance of certain others, is the researcher moved to inquire about the situation of a sura in the process of the growth of the corpus and its situation in the process of the emergence of a community. The venture is, however, worthwhile undertaking. Only the quest for the context – that is, the text nucleus which can be assumed to underlie every sura (except for the very short monopartite ones) and which conveys to it a kind of *tonus rectus* (to borrow a musical term), a sustained level of sound – will enable the researcher to fathom the uniqueness of a given sura as a piece of art and as a liturgical communication which is heavily dependent on the evocative power of the texts recited.[65]

Thus, to remain faithful to historico-critical procedures in Qur'anic research should not be taken as an obsession to discover the ur-text, to get at the 'original intention' and therefore be disqualified as 'ultimately meaningless'. It is undeniable that the procedure proposed here produces results tinted with uncertainty as long as it is applied solely to single texts. Only the consequent investigation into all the suras as literary texts and as liturgical communications, as an ensemble of pronunciations growing out of each other, will allow the definite verification or falsification of the heuristic basis. Until then, the attempt to achieve an approximate localisation of the suras in the canonical process is worth pursuing – no less indeed than the same procedure is regarded necessary as applied to the psalms, where it is attested as a self-evident step of investigation, even in the latest contributions to Biblical studies.

NOTES

1 According to Wansbrough, who initiated the debate, the final canonisation of the text not only marks the decisive caesura in the history of the text but also constitutes the vantage point for the construction of a history of the Islamic community; see Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*. See also Andrew Rippin, 'Literary Analysis of *Qur'ān*, *Tafsīr*, and *Sīra*: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough', in Martin, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, p. 161: 'Canonization and stabilization of the text of the Qur'an goes hand in hand with the formation of the community. A final, fixed text of the scripture was not required, nor was it totally feasible, before political power was firmly controlled; thus the end of the second/eighth century becomes a likely historical moment for the gathering together of oral tradition and liturgical elements leading to the emergence of the fixed canon of scripture

and the emergence of the actual concept, "Islam".' Burton, in *Collection of the Qur'ān*, puts forward the contrasting hypothesis that the corpus was redacted by the Prophet himself. For a review of Burton's ideas, see Neuwirth, Review of *The Collection of the Qur'ān*. Wansbrough's approach has also influenced scholars outside Qur'anic studies; see al-Azmeh's comments in 'Muslim Canon'.

2 See Andrew Rippin, 'Muḥammad in the Qur'ān: Reading Scripture in the 21st Century', in Harald Motzki, ed., *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 298–309.

3 For a summary of the traditional reports, see Neuwirth, 'Koran'.

4 For codification processes in antiquity where this principle (which originated from an ancient Egyptian prototype) has been observed and explicitly articulated, see Assmann, *Cultural Memory*.

5 Concerning the exceptional cases of suras which seem to have already formed groups in the pre-'Uthmānic corpus, see the references adduced by Neuwirth, 'Koran'.

6 The conception of the sura as a unit bearing meaning has been rediscovered, as Mustansir Mir has stressed, by Muslim exegetes only more recently; see Mir, '*Sūra* as a Unity'. For an explanation of the diminishing interest in the sura as a literary unit, see chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

7 The use of the *sīra* to facilitate the understanding of the Qur'an is controversial. For a novel attempt to discuss the *sīra* in its own right, see Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder. The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims: A Textual Analysis* (Princeton, NJ, 1995).

8 Traces of such a history – like those of a literary structure – are denied in macrostructural research; see Andrew Rippin, 'The Qur'an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects', *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 10 (1983), pp. 38–47.

9 Ibid., p. 46.

10 See Susan Rubin Suleiman and Inge Crosman Wimmers, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ, 1980).

11 Assmann and Assmann, 'Kanon und Zensur'.

12 Ibid., pp. 22–3.

13 Ibid., p. 22.

14 Ibid., p. 23.

15 See Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (London, 1992).

16 See, for instance, Alford T. Welch, 'Muhammad's Understanding of Himself: The Koranic Data', in Hovannisian and Vryonis, *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, pp. 15–51; N.A. Newman, *Muhammad, the Qur'an and Islam* (Hatfield, PA, 1996). This stance has been severely critiqued by Rippin, 'Muḥammad in the Qur'ān'.

17 See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, I, p. 48; McAuliffe, '"Debate with them in a better way"'.

18 For a summary analysis of the composition of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 264–6. For a discussion of the Qur'anic characteristic of self-referentiality, see Wild, *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān*.

19 Arberry translates this as *Those are the signs of the Book and of a manifest Qur'an*, which blurs both the character of the celestial writing and the mundane performance of its reading or recitation.

20 For the relationship between the acoustically perceived recitation and the Prophet's reading from the transcendent text, see Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

21 For the concept of 'speech extended in time and space' ('*zerdehnte Rede*'), a term coined by Konrad Ehlich, see his 'Text und sprachliches Handeln'.

22 The elements of the composition of Meccan suras are discussed in Neuwirth, *Studien*.

23 Text 2 integrates the motif of signs implied in creation which occurs frequently in the oldest suras; see ibid., pp. 187–201.

24 For a reference to the function of the *shayāṭīn* (demons) as transmitters of supernatural knowledge, see Q. 81:25.

25 For an understanding of the use of the term mythic/myth here, and for a further discussion of myths in the Qur'an, see chapter 14, 'Myths and Legends in the Qur'an? An Itinerary through its Narrative Landscape', in this volume. On the implications of this narrative for the perception of evil, see chapter 9, 'Evil'. This myth about the heavenly deal is discussed by Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*. See also Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden, 1983) and more recently Whitney S. Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblis: Narrative Theology in the Qur'an* (Cambridge, MA, 2011).

26 The retribution legends are discussed by Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*. For the placement of this Abraham/Lot narrative within the Qur'anic Abraham vita, see Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, pp. 97–160.

27 Q. 15:75 is a challenge to the acuteness of the listeners, for it invites them to connect the punishment mentioned here, the throwing of the stones of clay (the *ḥijāratun min sijjīl*), with the appropriate precedent case, i.e. of the *aṣḥāb al-fīl* who were pelted with stones of clay in the earlier *Sūrat al-Fīl*.

28 For an affirmation of the eschatological truth, see, for example, *al-khalq . . . bi'l-ḥaqq* in Q. 15:85 and *We send not down the angels, except with truth* (*mā nunzilu'l-malā'ikata illā bi'l-ḥaqq*) in Q. 15:8 (text 1).

29 See *and be of those that bow* (*wa kun mina'l-sājidīn*) in Q. 15:98 and *fall you down, bowing before him!/Then the angels bowed themselves down all together* (*fa-qa'ū lahu sājidin; fa-sajada'l-malā'ikatu kulluhum ajma'ūn*) in Q. 15:29–30.

30 See Q. 15:31.

31 See *leave them to eat, and to take their joy, and to be bemused by hope* (*dharhum ya'kulū wa yatamatta'ū wa yulhihimu'l-amalu*) in Q. 15:3 (text 1) and *stretch not thine eyes to that We have given* [*groups*] *of them to enjoy* (*lā tamuddanna 'aynayka ilā mā matta'nā bihi azwājan minhum*) in Q. 15:88 (text 5).

32 See *leave them to eat . . . certainly they will soon know* (*dharhum ya'kulū . . . wa sawfa ya'lamūn*) in Q. 15:3 (text 1) and *those who set up with God another God. Certainly they will soon know!* (*alladhīna yaj'alūna ma'a'llāhi ilāhan ākhara fa-sawfa ya'lamūn*) in Q. 15:96 (text 5).

33 Compare *They say: 'Thou, upon whom the Remembrance is sent down, thou are assuredly possessed!* (*wa qālū yā ayyuhā'lladhī nuzzila 'alayhi'l-dhikru innaka la-majnūn*) in Q. 15:6 (text 1) with *We know indeed they breast is straitened by the things they say* (*wa-laqad na'lamu annaka yaḍīqu ṣadruka bi-mā yaqūlūn*) in Q. 15:97 (text 5).

34 Compare *not a single messenger came to them, but they mocked at him* (*wa-mā ya'tīhim min rasūlin illā kānu bihi yastahzi'ūn*) in Q. 15:11 (text 1) with *We suffice thee against the mockers, even against those who set up with God another god* (*innā kafaynāka'l-mustahzi'īn*) in Q. 15:95–6 (text 5).

35 In this text, it may be justified to speak of the emergence of a conceptual matrix. The dichotomy between the disturbed and the clear perception of reality is a motif which extends throughout the sura. In earlier suras it was the matrix of images that served the same purpose; see the discussion in chapter 4, 'Images'.

36 See Q. 15:75–77 and Q. 15:79.

37 See Q. 15:4–5 (*ihlāk qarya*, the destruction of a city) and Q. 15:49–77 (the stories of Abraham and Lot).

38 This applies to text 2 in general.

39 See Q. 15:87: '*al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm*'; also see the section entitled 'Metatextual references to the genesis of a scripture in progress' later in this chapter.

40 Q. 15:3 and Q. 15:88 raise the issue of the luxurious lifestyle of the unbelieving contemporaries; Q. 15:4 recalls the annihilation of communities not unlike the cities (*qurā*) in Mecca's neighbourhood.

41 Based on the sura, it would appear that at this stage a change in worldview is occurring; there is the adoption of a vision that is diametrically opposed to the norms of the sociopolitical surroundings. For the concept of conversion, see Thomas Luckmann, 'Kanon und Konversion', in Assmann and Assmann, *Kanon und Zensur*, pp. 38–46.

42 See Assmann, *Cultural Memory*.

43 Of the two references to the text *qur'ān*, Q. 15:87 and Q. 15:91, we have to dismiss one, Q. 15:91, which is apparently not preserved integrally; for attempts at an emendation of the perhaps incomplete text, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 265–6.

44 See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ*, p. 28. See also Wild, 'Die andere Seite'. A lucid analysis of Abū Zayd's *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ* has been given by Navid Kermani, *Offenbarung als Kommunikation: Das Konzept waḥy in Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's 'Mafhūm al-naṣṣ'* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996).

45 Here, a glance at the genre of the love poem may prove helpful. The ghazal, like the Qur'anic verses, is addressed to a 'you', the beloved; however, since love poems claim to be literary works whose address is not exclusively directed at the beloved, its recipients include outsiders as well. See the convincing argument on this matter by Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine literatur- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Ġazal* (Wiesbaden, 1998).

46 Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī* (Cairo, 1992), p. 194; see Kermani, *Offenbarung als Kommunikation*, pp. 10–11.

47 For the often didactic *clausulas* juxtaposing positively and negatively evaluated comments, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 157–66 and, particularly, eadem, 'Zur Struktur der *Yūsuf*-Sure'. These devices seem to presuppose a public that is yet to be indoctrinated with monotheistic ideas.

48 For the Qur'anic cosmology in general, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*.

49 The allusion might be to the account of the vision recorded in *Sūrat al-Takwīr* (Q. 81:19–27).

50 The only narration preceding this account of the dispatch of messengers is the narrative of Abraham in *Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt*.

51 An event still recollected through the ancestral memory is reflected in one of the oldest suras, *Sūrat al-Fīl*.

52 Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ*, p. 27; Wild, 'Die andere Seite', p. 257.

53 For an application of this differentiation to modern literature, see Priska Furrer, 'Fenster zur Welt oder selbstreflektierender Spiegel? Referentialität und Textualität in der modernen türkischen Erzählliteratur', *Asiatische Studien* 50, no. 2 (1996), pp. 321–38.

54 See Jeffery, *The Qur'ān as Scripture*.

55 See Q. 84:21: *and when the Qur'an is recited to them they do not bow?* (*wa idhā quri'a 'alayhimu'l-qur'ānu lā yasjudūn*); Q. 55:1–2: *The All-merciful/has taught the Qur'an* (*al-raḥmān; 'allama'l-qur'ān*); Q. 54:40: *Now We have made the Qur'an easy for Remembrance. Is there any that will remember?* (*wa laqad yassarna'l-qur'āna li'l-dhikri; fa-hal min muddakkir*); Q. 75:17–18: *Ours it is to gather it, and to recite it/So, when We recite it, follow thou its recitation* (*inna 'alaynā jam'ahū wa qur'ānah; fa idhā qara'nāhu fa'ttabi' qur'ānah*).

56 See the detailed presentation of this matter in chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

57 See Q. 81:22, Q. 68:2, Q. 54:9, Q. 52:29, Q. 51:39, Q. 51:52; see also Angelika Neuwirth, 'Der historische Muhammad im Spiegel des Koran: Prophetentypus zwischen Seher und Dichter', in Wolfgang Zwickel, ed., *Biblische Welten* (Göttingen, 1993), pp. 83–108.

58 See Q. 74:24, Q. 54:2, Q. 52:15; Neuwirth, 'Der historische Muhammad'.

59 For an attempt to situate *Surat al-Isrā'* (a sura closely related to *Surat al-Ḥijr*) in the genetic development of the Qur'an, see chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.

60 It is noteworthy that in this early account of the dispatch of messengers, the situation of the proclaimer is mirrored primarily in the situation of Lot who is burdened with the obligation to shelter his protégés, or more precisely his guests (*ḍayf*); see Q. 15:88: *lower thy wing unto*

the believers (*wa'khfiḍ janāḥaka li'l-mu'minīn*). This task is equally imposed on Muhammad. The strength required of the community to persevere in their belief, even against reason, appears to have been prefigured in Abraham's attitude.

61 See Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 226–8; eadem, *Der Koran: Band I*, pp. 199–216.

62 *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* is in no way an isolated case. For more suras that can be read as liturgies/services, see chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

63 For a complete list of the echoes of the *Fātiḥa* in *Surat al-Ḥijr*, see chapter 6, '*Fātiḥa*'.

64 Q. 73:20 and Q. 52:28 may be considered later additions; see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 206–7 and pp. 213–14. They are, therefore, ignored here.

65 This argument about the sura as a piece of art is based on my experience with the Meccan suras; an investigation of the Medinan suras is still a desideratum.

8

From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple: *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (Q. 17), between Text and Commentary*

The Problem of the Nocturnal Journey in Context

THREE HONORARY titles are assigned to Jerusalem in Islam. They are:

1. 'First of the Two Directions of Prayer' (*ūlā al-qiblatayn*),
2. 'Second of the Two Places of Worship' (*thānī al-masjidayn*),
3. 'Third [in rank] after the Two Sanctuaries' (*thālith al-ḥaramayn*).[1]

These three honorifics encapsulate the significance of the city for the educated Muslim and his religious community to the present day.[2] They do not, however, constitute a purely panegyrical expression of the momentous 'merits of Jerusalem';[3] rather, they summarise the ambivalent position of Jerusalem in Islam, an ambivalence that emerged as a result of extended theological controversies. The rhetorically suggestive augmentation of the numerical value in the beginnings of the three honorifics should not obscure the fact that the seemingly ascending sequence of these honorary titles is, de facto, inversely related to the actual development of Jerusalem's recognition as a religious centre. While the sequence of the titles certainly reflects a development of increasing plurality and complexity in the perception of the holy places, it simultaneously marks a process of successive demotions of Jerusalem from its inherited primacy as the central place of monotheistic worship.

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple: *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, Between Text and Commentary', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry Walfish and Joseph Goering, eds., *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 376–407. Reprinted by kind permission of Oxford University Press, USA.

We will briefly review the implications of the three epithets assembled in this succinct, tripartite formula. The opening honorific, 'First [i.e. historically earliest] of the Two Directions of Prayer', refers to the physically performed ritual of turning oneself towards an imagined, distant sanctuary for prayer, a custom introduced during the time of the Prophet's activity in Mecca. This practice not only served to open the central ceremony of the newly developed verbal worship of the early community but also, as will be argued, was understood to be closely connected with an important spiritual experience of the Prophet reflected in the Qur'an itself, that of his nocturnal journey to the remote temple (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*), that is, to Jerusalem. Although Muslims later faced Mecca (instead of Jerusalem) while praying, they remembered Jerusalem as the initial *qibla* of the community.

The middle honorific, 'Second [i.e. historically later] of the Two Places of Worship', recalls the apparent rivalry, conceived during the Prophet's activity in Medina, between the founding places of the two basic forms of monotheistic worship – the ritual and the verbal – regarded as two subsequent stages of development. Mecca, which houses the Kaaba, was recognised as the original home of Abrahamic worship, which manifests itself above all in the rites of pilgrimage; by contrast, *al-masjid al-aqṣā*, the sanctuary of the Banū Isrā'īl (the Israelite forebears of the Jews), appeared as the centre of the Land Blessed by God (*al-arḍ allatī bāraknā fīhā*), the land of the activity of Moses and Jesus and other Biblically known prophets whose message survived in verbal forms. Among these two places, as Q. 3:96 declares for the first time, the Kaaba is to be regarded as the earlier sanctuary and, by implication, Jerusalem the later one.

The last honorific name, 'Third after the Two Sanctuaries', reflects a later compromise which emerged a few generations after the death of the Prophet. As doubts about the orthodox character of revering Jerusalem as a holy place began to coalesce, theologians and legal scholars responded with a restriction:[4] 'Jerusalem retained a place in the restricted canon of sanctuaries, the prominent places of pilgrimage, while other sites seeking that privilege remained excluded, but its rank was relegated to third after Mecca and Medina.'[5] This limited canonisation was meant to control the still powerful tendency to credit Jerusalem with its ancestral rank as the centre of the world, the starting point of creation and, ultimately, of the dissolution of the created world,[6] a trend resumed and enhanced by the Umayyad building policy (the Dome of the Rock was completed by 'Abd al-Malik in 73/692) but widely regarded as dogmatically dubious.[7]

While the developments summarised in the last two epithets are based on unambiguous passages in the Qur'an or on hadiths and historical texts that are approximately datable, the role of Jerusalem for the early Islamic cult, as

reflected in the first honorary name, is by no means uncontroversial in modern research. On the contrary, the problem of the relevance of Jerusalem as the nucleus of significant religious institutions developed in the two older scriptural religions, and reclaimed to play a part in the genesis of the Qur'an and the Islamic cult – a problem that crystallises in the question of the direction of prayer, the *qibla* – is in no way solved. It has remained among the most controversial points of discussion about the historicity of the mainstream Islamic presentation of the early period.[8]

This chapter is an attempt to deal with the question of the *qibla* from a new angle, bringing it down from the lofty heights of exegetical discussion based on a wide spectrum of heterogeneous religious ideas to the more limited forum of plain (though sometimes fragmentary) Qur'anic debates. By critically reconsidering some Hadith evidence accepted as early in recent research, we shall further try to elucidate the significance of the initial orientation towards Jerusalem and provide the background of its later abrogation in favour of a *qibla* towards Mecca (part I). A necessary precondition for such a deeper understanding of the cultic significance of the *qibla* is an inquiry into the form and structure of the key verse Q. 17:1 as well as a reconstruction of its Qur'anic context, which it has been sadly denied in modern research (part II). However, the investigation into Q. 17:1 cannot dispense with a consideration of some representation from the amply developed narrative commentary on this verse which, in spite of substantial differences, can be shown to converge on certain focal points (part III). Since this chapter is meant last but not least to highlight the relations feasible between text and commentary, it will focus on *Sūrat al-Isrā'* as a specimen of internal Qur'anic exegesis. The references to the *qibla* in this sura will be placed in the context of the particular process of scriptural growth – the Qur'anic canonical process – and thus will be shown to mark relevant stages in the development of the rite of prayer and the debate about the signs of prophethood (part IV). After a short excursus about the way the Qur'anic text encapsulates the scenario of a canonical process which may yield insights into the emergence of a cultic community, we will return to the narrative exegesis and argue that its mythologising tendency constitutes a fundamentally different hermeneutical paradigm of reading the Qur'an from that which has been termed internal Qur'anic commentary. Inasmuch as it permits the dissolution of the Qur'anic context, narrative mythologising exegesis claims a rank above the restrictively paraenetic and eschatological discourse of the Qur'an, allowing the reader to recontextualise Qur'anic wordings (part V).

Focusing on the Qur'an, this investigation is constructed on a textual basis that more recently has been marginalised in favour of a focus on the much

richer exegetic Hadith literature. A number of recent studies in Hadith texts have contributed substantially to a more complex image of the earliest Islamic developments, often strongly revising older positions. Results of such research are, however, seldom related to the Qur'anic vision.[9] In spite of the often repeated observation that the Qur'an, with its peculiar structure, which follows neither chronological nor systematic criteria, yields little as an immediate source of history, we will for our purpose of clarifying the problem of the *qibla*, look for exegetical evidence primarily in the Qur'an itself.[10] This chapter is meant to vindicate the perusal of Qur'anic references as historical evidence.

Any evaluation of Qur'anic evidence has, of course, in one way or another to respond to the radical re-evaluation of the generally accepted authenticity of the Qur'an as a text corpus going back to the Prophet Muhammad, which was introduced into the scholarly discussion by Wansbrough's revolutionary *Quranic Studies*.[11] Depending on the particular premise a researcher chooses to follow – crediting the Qur'an as an authentic testimony from the years 610 CE to 632 CE or considering it as merely a further 'collection of traditions' that were canonised later – varying conclusions may be reached. As long as one clings to the heuristic basis of the historicity of the Prophet as a mediator of the texts collected in the Qur'an, it seems advisable to confront the results of Hadith research with those of an analysis of the Qur'anic evidence itself. The Qur'anic texts in such an analysis should of course be viewed not as already fixed and binding statements but rather as attestations to a process of growth, the canonical process turning the Qur'an into a scripture (see part IV of this chapter). This approach will be pursued in the following discussion of the question of the community's first orientation of prayer – a case where Qur'anic and Hadith evidence contradict each other and recent research has argued in favour of the accounts presented in Hadith literature.

Part I: *Ūlā al-qiblatayn*

The *qibla* as a case

Was the Kaaba the first orientation of prayer? According to Rubin, 'it is clear that the façade of the Ka'ba was his [Muhammad's] first *qibla*'.[12] Rubin arrived at this assumption through partly explicit and partly implicit information yielded by numerous Hadith traditions. It is true that exegetical Hadith literature offers a different picture from the finally reached Islamic consensus, which holds, in keeping with the honorary title '*ūlā al-qiblatayn*', that the Jerusalem *qibla* goes back to the Prophet's Meccan activities, even though it is

no longer possible to date the practice exactly.[13] In many instances in Hadith literature, the Jerusalem *qibla* is viewed as a gesture of compromise towards the Jews, and thus its introduction is transferred to the time immediately after the Prophet's emigration to Medina (the *hijra*).[14] This attempt at dating – particularly frequent in the hadiths related by Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) – echoes the polemical stance maintained in the Qur'anic context of the abrogation of the first *qibla* (Q. 2:142–5) and relativises the unpopular but undeniable fact that a *qibla* towards Jerusalem was shared with the Jews for a longer period, until its replacement some eighteen months after the *hijra*.

Hadiths also record divergent datings of the introduction of the Jerusalem *qibla*, such as 'eighteen months before the *hijra*',[15] implying that the *qibla* was taken over from neo-Muslim converts resident in Medina, or 'at the same time as the revelation of *Sūrat al-Isrā*".[16] Rubin has rightly rejected the overstated assumption, held by some traditionalists, that Muhammad prayed towards Jerusalem 'since his first revelation'. He interprets the tradition, however, as being a tendentious repression of an earlier *qibla* towards the Kaaba,

> its aim being to suppress the fact that Muhammad, at a certain stage, abandoned his original *qibla* (the Kaʿba) in favour of Jerusalem. In fact, most of the traditions that describe his praying toward Jerusalem while in Mecca maintain that he used to stand opposite the southeastern wall of the Kaʿba in order to have the Kaʿba between himself and Jerusalem.[17]

However, the consideration of both the Kaaba and Jerusalem as the *qiblatān*, as Arent J. Wensinck stressed,[18] looks far more like a compromise, one that can be easily explained as an effort of the respective transmitters to honour the final *qibla* of Islam with an early supererogatory exercise of the Prophet or to ascribe to the Prophet a supernatural gift of knowing in advance religious practices that were to be divinely sanctioned later on, a pattern of thinking which can frequently be traced in the biographies of Muhammad (*sīra*).[19]

The question of the *qibla* thus cannot be solved by investigating Islamic tradition alone. Rubin, who in his study relies exclusively on Hadith material, justly noted the uncertain premises involved in accepting the theory of an early adoption of Jerusalem as the first *qibla*. He tried to demonstrate that the Kaaba, which at the time of Muhammad already had attracted varied ritual exercises, functioned as a place of ritual prayer for the *jāhilī* Meccans and, hence, for Muhammad's community in the earliest period of his activities prior to the development of Islam. The question arises, however, as to whether the Hadith material can be regarded as sufficiently free from tendentiousness simply because of its broad base of evidence to disqualify the view of the predominant version – and to establish the Kaaba as the 'first *qibla*' in lieu of

Jerusalem – or whether individual hadiths should not rather be read as expressing certain apologetic motives of a later period. Such tendentiousness, as Wensinck rightly stressed, could be excluded on the assumption that the Jewish *qibla* was adopted during the Prophet's time of activity in Mecca. Since this assumption – that is, Jerusalem being the first *qibla* – though not supported by an explicit Qur'anic text, did become the dominant view, I will examine the evidence supporting it.

Imagining the remote temple (*al-masjīd al-aqṣā*)

Perhaps the complex notion of a *qibla* itself provides the most convincing argument in favour of the primacy of Jerusalem. For even if one accepts as probable that Muhammad and his community did initially pray facing the Kaaba, the question arises of whether this practice alone fulfils the notion of 'taking up a direction of prayer'. Does not a ritual *qibla*, like that mentioned in the Medinan verses Q. 2:142–4, point instead to an orientation towards a sanctuary not directly accessible to the person praying but rather sought after in the imagination? Let us look at the Qur'anic statements themselves: it is well known that the Qur'an speaks only about the abolishment of the 'earlier direction of prayer', evidently presupposing the listeners' knowledge of that earlier direction towards Jerusalem.

Q. 2:142–4

142 *The fools among the people will say,*
'What has turned them from the direction
they were facing in their prayers aforetime?' . . .
143 *. . . We did not appoint the direction thou wast facing,*
except that We might know who followed the Messenger . . .
144 *We have seen thee turning thy face about in the heaven;*
now We will surely turn thee to a direction that shall satisfy thee.
Turn thy face towards the Holy Mosque (al-masjid al-ḥarām);
and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it . . .

The verses seem to reflect a crisis as well as its final solution. On the one hand, the abolishment of the initial *qibla* (towards Jerusalem), about whose duration the text says nothing, meets with criticism by outsiders ('they') against whom it has to be asserted. The initial *qibla* is thus demoted in importance and viewed as a merely provisional orientation, a test of the community. The newly introduced *qibla* (of the Kaaba), presented as a substitute apt to give satisfaction to those addressed, is, however, not marked as the resumption of an older practice, as would be expected had the Meccan worship already entailed turning to such a *qibla*. The new *qibla* is certainly novel, yet not in need of

theological justification, since it fits into the cult reform initiated at Medina where the newly developed concept of religion (*dīn*) encompassed a revival of an 'Abrahamic monotheism'.[20] At the same time, the passage clearly shows the peculiar intention underlying a divinely institutionalised *qibla*: the worshipper who may be far away from the holy place (*wherever you are*, Q. 2:144) must turn his face towards it in prayer. The verses presume the possibility of the worshipper's being remote from the Kaaba, perhaps even in exile.

It is precisely this remoteness of the worshippers from the sanctuary intended as their point of orientation that underlies the earlier Jerusalem *qibla*. Indeed, the very fact of its material inaccessibility enhances its significance. The typological difference between an accessible sanctuary in which, or in whose surroundings, rites are performed and a holy place that serves as the orientation and direction of prayer from which the worshippers are remote and for which they must search in their imagination is obvious. The latter understanding of a *qibla* echoes throughout the Qur'anic verse and reminds us of the Biblical text 1 Kings 8, especially verses 33–4, with its reference to the tradition in Judaism of facing Jerusalem while praying:

> When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house:/then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers.

The worshipper's assumption of such an orientation is based upon more complex preconditions than his simply being present at the holy place: it presupposes the intention to maintain one's own indigenous cult in an alien milieu, even against obstacles. In the case of the believers living in a situation of exile it further presupposes the hope of the resumption of their cult *in situ*.

A corresponding awareness with regard to the rites at the Kaaba can hardly be asserted for Muhammad and his community before their Medinan exile. In the Meccan community, complex forms of verbal worship clearly based on elements of the two older monotheistic religions had emerged, complementing the inherited rites.[21] Prayers and other rites of the early community may have been performed in front of the Kaaba and the worshippers may be imagined to have faced (*istaqbala*) the Kaaba.[22] It would be a gross anachronism, however, to understand the lexeme in its later sense of 'ritually facing an imaginary point for the convergence of prayers' for the early Meccan community. As against that, the Medinan community, or at least the Meccan emigrants among them, would have viewed the Kaaba from a different perspective. To them, the Kaaba would have appeared as a meaningful replacement of

Jerusalem since, by then, their own situation had come close to that of exile inspiring a nostalgic attitude towards the lost homeland where their election had first occurred. In any event, with the newly evolving cultic concept, Mecca and the Kaaba gradually came to mark a starting point within salvation history, as is clearly documented in Q. 3:96: *The first House established for the people was that at Bekka* [*Mecca*], *a place holy, and a guidance to all beings* (*Inna awwala baytin wuḍiʿa li'l-nāsi la'lladhī fī Bakkata, mubārakan wa hudan li'l-ʿālamīn*). What was founded here are the rites of the new *dīn*, a heritage mentioned in diverse Medinan verses and integrated into Biblical salvation history in Q. 14:35–7: *And when Abraham said, 'My Lord, make this land secure, and turn me and my sons away from serving idols/ . . . Our Lord, let them perform the prayer . . .'* (*Wa-idh qāla Ibrāhīmu rabbī jʿal hādhā'l-balada āminan wa'jnubnī wa baniyya an naʿbuda'l-aṣnām; rabbanā, li-yuqīmu'l-ṣalāt . . .*),[23] and Q. 2:128: . . . *our Lord . . . show us our holy rites* . . . (. . . *rabbanā . . . arinā manāsikanā . . .*). It is noteworthy, however, that Mecca was to inherit still another merit of Jerusalem: to be the cradle not of ritual worship alone but of monotheistic verbal worship as well – Q. 2:129: *and, our Lord, do Thou send among them a Messenger, one of them, who shall recite to them Thy signs, and teach them the Book and the Wisdom, and purify them: Thou art the All-mighty, the All-wise*. Thus, the most important prerogative of Jerusalem (suggestively pronounced by Isaiah 2:3: 'for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem') had been transferred to Mecca, the locale of the most ancient temple.[24]

Part II: The Enigmatic Verse, Q. 17:1, and its Exegesis

Let us now try to situate Jerusalem on the mental map of the early community by investigating the Qur'anic texts related to the sanctuary so as to construct a context for the event of Jerusalem's elevation to the rank of the first *qibla*.

Salvation history localised in Jerusalem

It is true that Jerusalem, whose official (Roman) name in Qur'anic times was Aelia Capitolina,[25] though it was better known as Urshālīm among Christians and as Yerushalayyim among Jews, is never explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. Likewise, Mecca figures explicitly not more than twice,[26] being mentioned only in Medinan suras. The only place mentioned directly in Meccan texts is Mount Sinai, which appears nine times always in early suras.[27] Otherwise, toponyms are generally replaced by paraphrastic characterisations, or evoked through the particular sanctuaries by which they are distinguished.[28] It is a sacred topography not profane geography that the Qur'an designs; places

are presented as emblems. Jerusalem, though not mentioned explicitly, is, of course, not absent from the Qur'an.

A clear reference to Jerusalem, and specifically its temple, is found in *Sūrat Maryam*, which is usually dated to the middle Meccan period. Zachariah is presented as receiving a divine message in the *miḥrāb* unanimously understood as the temple (Q. 19:11). That the continuation of the episode of Mary's seclusion at an eastern place (*makānan sharqiyyā*, Q. 19:16) should also be located in the temple is suggested by the later Medinan account (Q. 3:37 and 39).[29] Earlier in salvation history, David acts as a judge (Q. 38:21) in the *miḥrāb*. In these cases, the temple is understood primarily in the physical sense as a monumental architecture. Likewise, the word *miḥrāb* in the plural (*maḥārīb*) in the sense of 'palaces', 'monumental buildings', figures in an account of Solomon (Q. 34:13). Yet, in *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, which is also considered middle Meccan, the temple, understood as the spiritual centre, or the emblem of the Banū Isrā'īl (the Israelites), is not presented as a *miḥrāb* but is designated as '*masjid*', 'place of worship' (Q. 17:7), a title otherwise reserved for the Meccan sanctuary.[30] This term is used in reference to two different epochs of the Jerusalem temple history: the 'temple of Solomon' and the 'second temple'. It is noteworthy here that the reference to the Jerusalem temple can be made with the single word *masjid*, qualified only by its relation to the Banū Isrā'īl, without further geographic determination. The isolated expression 'temple' (*masjid*) in Q. 17:7 thus either presupposes the listeners' familiarity with the notion of the Jerusalem temple or has to be taken as a reference to the less ambiguous mention of the temple in a preceding passage, that is, Q. 17:1.

All these references to the temple evoke the sanctuary as the scenario of major events in salvation history. Yet, they imply little about the significance of Jerusalem in the Prophet's and the community's consciousness. To explore this relation we have to look for a reference to the temple that has a direct bearing on the personal experience of the Prophet himself.

Q. 17:1: Evidence of the Prophet's personal relation to Jerusalem

There is indeed a single Qur'anic text that conveys a direct relationship between Jerusalem and the Prophet: in Q. 17:1, Jerusalem functions as the destination of the nocturnal journey of the Prophet. Here, too, the location is mentioned only indirectly, but it is made unambiguous through geographic localisation in the Holy Land, and its high status is confirmed through a parallelisation with the Meccan temple (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) as its antipode, with respect to which it is the remote temple (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*). Yet this reference to Jerusalem has raised problems. Unlike all the other indirect references to Jerusalem, it lacks a direct connection with events of the earlier salvation history familiar to the

listeners. Rather, it figures as the scene of a mysterious, though obviously important, biographical experience of the Prophet himself, one that is related in the Qur'an only on this occasion. Q. 17:1 reads:

Q. 17:1:[31]

a *Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night* (*asrā*)
b *from the Holy Mosque* [*Place of Worship*] *to the Further Mosque* [*Place of Worship*]
c *the precincts of which We have blessed,*
d *that We might show him some of Our signs.*
e *He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing.*[32]

The verse entails an individual's praise of God,[33] and it is introduced through a hymnic exclamation. What is celebrated here is unique in the Qur'anic representation of the Prophet: a nightly experience of closeness to the divine Other during which the Prophet felt himself transferred from the Meccan sanctuary (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) – or in a general sense, from Mecca – to the remote sanctuary situated in the Holy Land. It is true that describing the Jerusalem temple or the temple mount with the expression 'remote temple' (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*) is not immediately evident, but viewed in its relation to Mecca, site of the *masjid al-ḥarām* as the starting point of the departure, *al-masjid al-aqṣā* apparently functions not as a toponym but simply as an appellative. Jerusalem's temple obviously is present in the listeners' minds, though, as the remoter one in comparison with the Kaaba.

Though Q. 17:1 may lack an explicit salvation history context familiar to the listeners, there is at least the allusion to such a context in the phrase, *the precincts of which We have blessed*. The ensuing indication of divine–human interaction encapsulated in the words *that we might show him some of Our signs* attests for the Prophet a salvation history rank that recalls not only Moses' autopsy of the 'great sign' (see Exodus 3:3), but also, in an abridged form, Muhammad's earlier experience of a similar kind, namely his visions reflected in Q. 53:18: *Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord* (*laqad ra'ā min āyāti rabbihi'l-kubrā*).[34] In both instances, the perception of signs is the essence of the experience. The question arises as to how this biographical verse relates to the rest of the sura.

Formal problems: Is Q. 17:1 in its original place?

Western research proceeds unanimously from the hypothesis that the first verse was not originally part of the corpus of the sura,[35] a problem which did not arise in traditional Islamic exegesis.[36] Still, the relationship of the first verse to the rest of the sura is of relevance for the interpretation of this

seemingly isolated verse, which cannot be fully clarified without an attempt at contextualisation. Indeed, the verse displays some striking traits that distinguish it from the corpus of the sura, the first being its peculiar closing. The verse ends in an otherwise uncommon end rhyme *-īr*, forming an isolated unit vis-à-vis the following text rhyming in *-ūrā/īrā, -ūlā/īlā*, an irregularity that calls for an explanation, especially since it could easily have been avoided: a penultimate rhyme on *-īrā* conforming with the rest of the sura could have been attained through a simple repositioning of the syntagmas.[37]

Indeed, the corpus of the sura, Q. 17:2–111, appears self-sufficient. The first verse aside, the sura is well proportioned consisting of three sections made up of (1+)20/60/30 verses. Still, the second verse is obviously unfit to form the beginning of a sura, both stylistically and rhetorically. Starting with a *wa-* syndesis (i.e. the use of the conjunction 'and'), it seems to continue a preceding text. With its reference to the familiar topos of the revelation of a scripture serving as a divine sign, it also seems to provide an additional argument to a discourse already initiated. Now, the first verse without the *clausula* that isolates it structurally would be perfectly plausible as an initial verse, since a hymn that forms the beginning of a narrative section is by no means uncommon in the Qur'an. Already within the Meccan texts, numerous suras begin with a hymn followed by discursive sections. What is irregular about the first verse is not so much its complex structure and unique contents, but its special rhyme closure, even more so its *clausula*, which appears somewhat alien to the whole sura: *innahu huwa'l-samīʿul-baṣīr* (Q. 17:1e). Closures of this kind become predominant in late Meccan and Medinan suras, where the loose flow of speech is regularly interwoven with hymnic or paraenetic insertions, or *clausulas*, that function as an intrinsic commentary. In *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, however, all verses except Q. 17:1 end with a rhymed phrase that is not a paraenetic comment, but which forms part of the main strand of speech – a stylistic economy that characterises the sura as a middle Meccan text.

Now, one might consider the possibility that Q. 17:1 was once recited as a verse group made up of four short verses, inasmuch as its first three cola still resonate with a rhyme pattern (aCCā/ah-*asrā/aqṣā/ḥawlah*) that has been blurred by their integration into the structure of a long verse.[38] A comparison with the similar text in *Sūrat al-Najm* may clarify this hypothesis. The recollection of the two visions of the Prophet recorded there culminates in the appraisal in Q. 53:18: *laqad raʾā min āyāti rabbihi'l-kubrā*. Similarly, the fourth colon of Q. 17:1d: *li-nuriyahu min āyātinā*, which also entails the culmination of an experience, might have originally been the closing element of a short verse group of its own. It is true that the antepenultimately stressed *āyātinā* is not very suggestive as a rhyme ending and would as such be without parallel in the

Qur'an.[39] Also, as the keyword of its colon, it hardly appears fit to simultaneously fill the place of an ornamental (rhyme) element. If, however, the qualification *kubrā* (the greatest) given to the *āyāt* of a divine vision in *Sūrat al-Najm* could be conferred on the *āyāt* of the encounter with the divine recorded in *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, the verse would gain a suitable rhyme ending, and the entire ensemble (Q. 17:1a–e) would end with a convincing closure. The rhymes of the three preceding cola, *asrā*, *aqṣā* and *ḥawlah*, would regain their functionality as markers of verse endings in a group consisting of four verses. Their transmitted final shape as one long verse, unambiguously closed through a stereotypical *clausula*, may be due to their initially isolated transmission at a time when the main body of the sura had not yet been composed. As might be argued, the corpus of this sura (Q. 17:2–111) could have grown around the nucleus of the first verse in the course of the canonical process.[40] The initial verse, according to this hypothesis, should be viewed not as a secondary addition to the corpus of the sura, but rather as a temporarily independent pronouncement which was later elaborated through a 'commentary' setting it in its proper theological and cultic context, as found in Q. 17:2–111. However the composition of the sura came about, it should be considered not as isolated from the bulk of the sura, but rather as the trigger of the ensuing exposition of ideas.

Part III: Interpretations of Q. 17:1 Offered by the Islamic Tradition

Before turning to the key for understanding Q. 17:1 – namely, the corpus of *Sūrat al-Isrā'* – let us take a look at the exegesis of the verse as offered by Islamic tradition. Two different narratives have emerged, establishing substantially different ways of remembering the biographical episode. They may be labelled 'plain' and 'mythologising' respectively. A brief analysis of the structural elements of both types will reveal some essential traits of the narrative commentary whose re-reading of the Qur'an atomises the scriptural discourse into a host of isolated elements that invite employment at random to form new meaningful combinations. The resulting picture will serve as a backdrop for the clearer discernment of the tenets and techniques of that inner-Qur'anic exegesis which manifests itself in the particular process of growth of the text itself.

The nocturnal journey (*isrā'*) as a translocation to Jerusalem in a dream

Among the most popular of the 'plain' and 'sober' reports is a narrative, transmitted by Ṭabarī from Ibn Isḥāq that dispenses entirely with legendary trends of interpretation, in which the destination of the Prophet's nocturnal movement was Jerusalem. Umm Hāni', a cousin of the Prophet, reports:

> The nocturnal departure [*isrā'*, a term derived from the Qur'anic *asrā*, 'he made him depart by night'] of the Messenger of God took place as follows: He was staying at my house [indication of an ordinary place in Mecca instead of the precise location of the Kaaba, a strikingly free exegesis of the Qur'anic *al-masjid al-ḥarām*[41]] where he spent the night [interpretation of the Qur'anic *laylan* – 'by night']. When he had performed the final evening prayer he went to sleep and so did we. In the early morning God's Messenger woke us for the morning prayer and when we had concluded it together he said to me: 'Umm Hāni', I have been praying here together with you the evening prayer, as you remember. But then I was in *bayt al-maqdis* [Jerusalem; an explication of the Qur'anic remote temple – *al-masjid al-aqṣā*] and prayed there [prayer being an explication of the Qur'anic allusion to the vision of divine signs (*āyātinā*)]. And now I have been praying with you the morning prayer in this place.'[42]

Although we are not entitled to take this report as a firsthand testimony about the experience of the Prophet – the term *bayt al-maqdis* (the Arabic rendering of the Hebrew *bēt ha-miqdash*, 'temple') would perhaps not yet have figured in such a context[43] – it is remarkable for the paucity of its semantic preconceptions. It does not display any particular ideological tendency, nor does it refer to any supernatural power or experiences irreconcilable with the Qur'anic self-image of the Prophet. Also in favour of its genuineness is the observation that the Qur'anic text is not interpreted verbatim, but is dealt with like a specimen of ordinary discourse so that *al-masjid al-ḥarām*, taken as a synecdoche for Mecca, can be represented by a private house. This of course implies that the symbolic dimension of the text (*al-masjid al-ḥarām* = a sanctuary matching the Jerusalem temple in sacredness) has been erased. The miraculous traits of the event thus retreat into the background. Though the event occurred within an implausibly short time, the limited hours between two periods of prayer, this does not necessitate a supernatural agency, since it can be understood to have happened in a dream, as the report suggests.

A claim to a supernatural experience is, however, resounding in the Qur'anic verse itself with its triumphant tenor (*subḥāna*), its expressive mention of a locomotion between the two momentous sanctuaries of the Jewish and the pre-Islamic Arabian *ecumene* – an event felt to have taken place 'out of time'. Looking for a *Sitz im Leben* for *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, one might hypothesise that it originated out of a public provocation. The initial verse with the striking news of the Prophet's journey to Jerusalem – once recited to the Meccans in public – is reported to have aroused protests and derision. These reactions, which are also mirrored in the harsh polemics adduced in the corpus of *Sūrat al-Isrā'* itself, could not be ignored but had to be confronted. The response was

presented in a sophisticated reflection on the entire context of prophetical self-representation, expounded in Q. 17:2–111, a text that would seem to have been composed a short time after the promulgation of the event itself. Be that as it may, it is hard to miss that the vision (*ru'yā*) of the Prophet as well as the (rejected) notion of an ascension (*ruqiyy*) occupy important places in the corpus of the sura. Central, however, is the performance of prayer – not surprisingly so, since prayer in the exegesis of Q. 17:1 is not only the starting point of the experience but also its culmination and, finally, the end mark of the venture.

The nocturnal journey as a miraculous ride to Jerusalem followed by an ascent to heaven (*miʿrāj*)

As against that plain and sober report, there stands a narrative richly adorned with images and fantastic traits in which the nocturnal departure culminates in an ascent to heaven.[44] The story first appears separate from the translocation report, but already the classical biography of the Prophet by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/768), the *sīra* par excellence,[45] which transmits different versions of the nocturnal journey, contains a miraculous ride to Jerusalem culminating in a detailed description of an ascent to heaven. Both movements, the longitudinal leading to the earthly sanctuary and the vertical to the heavenly spheres, though ascribed to different transmitters (al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd, respectively) are dealt with by Ibn Isḥāq as successive phases of the same event (the reports going back to only a few generations after the death of the Prophet). The perspectives of these presentations differ radically from that of the plain report.

In the transmission of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, which is adduced here as a representative of the accounts of the miraculous journey to Jerusalem, the event is clearly framed as an initiation rite. The novice sleeping in the sanctuary is awakened with three strokes by the initiator, is led out by him and subjected to a test. Inserted between these steps is a scene staged in Jerusalem – completely in harmony with Qur'anic imagery – a gathering of the prophets familiar from Jewish and Christian salvation history. Among them Muhammad has to assert his rank. At the end, the story returns to the 'real' scenario at Mecca, where the report of the nocturnal journey with its supernatural traits has provoked criticism and even derision among the Qurayshites:

> I was told that al-Ḥasan said that the Prophet said: 'While I was sleeping [interpretation of the Qur'anic *laylān*] in the Ḥijr [narrow understanding of the *masjid al-ḥarām*] Gabriel came and stirred me with his foot. I sat up but

> saw nothing and lay down again. He came a second time and stirred me with his foot. I sat up, but saw nothing and lay down again. He came to me a third time and stirred me with his foot. I sat up and he took hold of my arm and I stood beside him and he brought me out to the door of the mosque and there was a white animal, half mule, half donkey [indication of an interpretation of the Qur'anic *asrā* as a movement on horseback], with wings on its sides with which it propelled its feet, putting down each forefoot at the limit of its sight and he mounted me on it. Then he went out with me keeping close to me.[46]

In this story al-Ḥasan said:

> The apostle and Gabriel went their way until they arrived at the temple [narrow understanding of the Qur'anic *al-masjid al-aqṣā*] at Jerusalem. There he found Abraham, Moses and Jesus among a company of the prophets [as bearers of the divine blessings, a representation of the Blessed Land, the Qur'anic *al-arḍ allatī bāraknā fīhā*]. The apostle acted as their imam in prayer [identification of the Qur'anic *āyāt* with the performance of a prayer in the community of the prophets]. Then he was brought two vessels, one containing wine and the other milk. The apostle took the milk and drank it, leaving the wine. Gabriel said: 'You have been rightly guided to the way of nature and so will your people be, Muhammad. Wine is forbidden you.' Then the apostle returned to Mecca and in the morning he told the Quraysh what had happened. Most of them said, 'By God, this is a plain absurdity! A caravan takes a month to go to Syria, and a month to return and can Muhammad do the return journey in one night?' Many Muslims gave up their faith.[47]

Ibn Isḥāq, then reporting on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khuḍrī, has the ascension story directly follow that of the miraculous journey to Jerusalem: 'I heard the apostle say: "After the completion of my task in Jerusalem a ladder (*miʿrāj*) was brought to me finer than any I have ever seen . . . My companion mounted it with me until we came to one of the gates of heaven."' This report is followed by visions of hell, then further climbings across the spheres, which are each occupied by one prophet until the seventh sphere is reached, from which a vision of paradise is opened up. The further description of the ascension attributed by Ibn Isḥāq to ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd, a secretary of the Prophet, concludes with the following scene:

> (Finally) they reached the seventh heaven and his Lord. There the duty of the fifty prayers was laid upon him. The apostle said: 'On my return I passed by Moses and what a fine friend of yours he was! He asked me how many prayers had been laid upon me and when I told him fifty he said, "Prayer is a weighty matter and your people are weak, so go back to your Lord and ask him to

> reduce the number for you and your community." I did so and He took off ten. Again I passed by Moses and he said the same again; and so it went on until only five prayers for the whole day and night were left. Moses again gave me the same advice. I replied that I had been back to my Lord and asked him to reduce the number until I was ashamed and I would not do it again. Any one of you who performs them in faith and trust will have the reward of fifty prayers.[48]

Attempt at an evaluation of the accounts of the nocturnal journey and ensuing ascent

The peculiar fact that the two phases of the movement, the longitudinal departure to Jerusalem and the vertical ascension through the spheres, do not belong together typologically has already been pointed out by Horovitz (1919). For their proper religio-historical context we need only refer to the detailed studies by Geo Widengren (1955), and more recently by Heribert Busse (1991) and Josef van Ess (1999).[49] For our purposes, it suffices to note the structural elements comprised in each of the reports. For the miraculous ride to Jerusalem, these are as follows: (1) the awakening of the novice by the initiator; (2) his mounting a miraculous animal (donkey/mule) with the ability of time-lapse movement; (3) after the arrival at the destination, Muhammad's performance of a prayer rite by assuming the function of imam among the older prophets; (4) the testing of the novice.

It is obvious that elements (1) and (4) as parts of a rite of initiation and (2) as an obscure evocation of a messianic entrance into Jerusalem are alien to the horizon of Qur'anic imagery.[50] As against that, element (3), the core of the report, can be read as a narrative application of the Qur'anic prophetology that culminates in the 'seal word' (Q. 33:40: *Muhammad . . . is the Seal of the Prophets*) and the elevation of the Prophet to a close relationship with the heavenly hierarchy (Q. 33:56: *God and His angels bless the Prophet . . .*). In this narrative account, the Prophet's elevation to his superior rank vis-à-vis the other prophets is established through his acting as an imam in the collective prayer offered in the Jerusalem sanctuary with the previous prophets.

The components of the ascension story are similarly heterogeneous: (1) the Prophet's climbing up a heavenly ladder; (2) his visiting the prophets situated in the diverse spheres; (3) after arriving at the destination, his receiving the obligation of fifty daily prayers; (4) his following Moses' advice to ask for a reduction in number; (5) divine confirmation of the value of the five daily prayers.

Here again, elements (1) and (2) are alien to the Qur'anic imagery. They presuppose the psychological type of an ecstatic hardly reconcilable with

Muhammad's Qur'anic profession as a messenger.[51] The situation of the prophets in the spheres, moreover, reflects the image of planetary deities governing the movement of the spheres that is familiar from antiquity. Elements (3) and (4) appearing at the centre of the narrative are more in line with the Qur'anic imagination. Here, the central role of Muhammad is complemented by the important yet marginal role played by Moses. It is noteworthy that Moses, rather than Muhammad, initially appears to be the superior in authority; it is he who gives advice based on his experience as the leader of a community, a tribute of honour, inspired, as we will see, by *Sūrat al-Isrā'* itself. The account of the ascension culminates, as did the stories of the nocturnal journey and the miraculous ride, in the idea of prayer. The *āyāt* – that according to Q. 17:1 are bestowed on the Prophet and that are elaborated in the narrative exegesis into miraculous adventures of a cultural hero – even in the most daring mythologising version, culminate in none other than the divine communication of the institution of prayer.

Part IV: The Corpus of *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (Q. 17:2–111) as a Commentary on Q. 17:1

Sūrat al-Isrā' and its position in the canonical process

Having thus digressed into the narrative commentary on Q. 17:1, we will now turn to the internal Qur'anic elaboration of the verse. For the discussion of the relation of Q. 17:1 to the corpus of the sura, Q. 17:2–111, as well as to other Qur'anic texts, it is useful to rely on the approach developed by Childs, who has proposed an understanding of the genesis of the canon as a process of growth – an approach which has been adopted in the chapters throughout this volume. It attests to a 'canonisation from below', the driving force behind this process of growth being the continual publication of texts and their acceptance by the community. This process aptly accounts for the shape of the Qur'an, which reflects the dialogic mode of its genesis.[52] It is mirrored, as we shall see, in a striking shape in the relationship between the initial verse and the corpus of *Sūrat al-Isrā'*. The bulk of the sura unfolds and discusses the implications, both textual and political, of the initial verse.

Q. 17:2–111 as a document of a controversy about the significance of prophetic signs

The sura, despite the diversity of its topoi and the allusive nature of their discussion, displays a well-balanced composition. The text as a whole provides an elaboration of the frequently treated theme of divine communication with

mankind through prophets, with a particular focus on the significance and diversity of signs as ascribed to the prophets. Uniquely in the Qur'an, the sura presents in parallel two prophetic figures, Moses and Muhammad,[53] who alternately play the main roles in its narrative, other prophetic agents being only marginally recalled. Though Moses and Muhammad are chronologically separated, their roles are closely related, the gap being bridged by a number of shared experiences and notions, not the least of which is sacred topography, as introduced through Q. 17:1, wherein the Meccan Prophet is understood to have entered the imaginary territory associated with Moses, the Holy Land – a kind of appropriation of the other's space. The sura is built around the nuclear elements of: (1) two prophets in synopsis – Muhammad and Moses, characterised by their prophetic signs as developed in previous suras; (2) significant movements – the liberating experience of a movement out of familiar space, the fear from an enforced movement out of familiar space (exodus, *isrā'*, vs. expulsion, *istifzāz*, as experienced by both; Q. 17:64 and Q. 17:76: Muhammad, Q. 17:103: Moses) as well as spiritual movements, the outgoing/exit (*makhraj*) and the ingoing/entry (*mudkhal*) (Q. 17:80), and demanded, but not performed, ecstatic movements, *ruqiyy* (Q. 17:93); (3) 'movements in spirit' – that is, enactments of divine–human communication through the related experience of a vision (*ru'yā*, Q. 17:60), the transcendence of familiar horizons of perception; and finally (4) other signs, such as the communal prayer as a novel liturgical achievement of the emerging Qur'anic community.

The sura can thus be read as a matrix of what will later be fantastically elaborated to form the narratives of *isrā'* and *mi'rāj* in Hadith literature. The central difference between the Qur'anic and the Hadith discourse, however, is less the diverse number of imaginary elements than the distinct cast of the experience. In the Qur'an we witness a communication process in which divine prerogatives (guardianship, providence, etc), and human attitudes and perceptions (gratitude, reason etc.) as links between the speaker and the audience never fade, while leaving the modalities of the transcendent experience undisclosed, whereas the Hadith version has taken the form of a narration that unfolds particular elements in a fantastic way to satisfy an audience requesting a narrative closure for some of their most cherished Qur'anic images and an aetiological explanation for the core elements of their rituals.

First section of the sura (Q. 17:2–21): Nocturnal journey/history of the temple and the teaching of Moses/the rank of the new revelation

The first section starts with a hymnic appraisal of the divine sign granted to Muhammad, that is his nocturnal departure (*isrā'*),[54] recalled through a

hymnic exclamation glorifying God (*subḥāna*, Q. 17:1). It continues with the sign granted to Moses, a figure whose memory has already been evoked through the association of the exodus with *isrā'*.[55] Moses' sign is the scripture (*kitāb*, Q. 17:2), whose essence is the commandment of the exclusive worship of one God: *'Take not unto yourselves any guardian apart from Me'* (*lā tattakhidhū min dūnī wakīla*, Q. 17:2). The servant of God complying with this command proves grateful: *he was a thankful servant* (*kāna ʿabdan shakūrā*, Q. 17:3). The scripture (or the heavenly archetype of the revealed scriptures) is subsequently identified with the book of providence, which has destined for the people of Moses, the Banū Isrā'īl, that they will twice commit grave sins through arrogance:[56] *'You shall do corruption in the earth twice, and you shall ascend exceedingly high'* (*la-tufsidunna fī'l-arḍi marratayni wa la-taʿlunna ʿuluwwan kabīrā*, Q. 17:4). They will both times be punished through the desecration of their sanctuary (*al-masjid*, Q. 17:7) which, in Q. 17:1, qualified by the attribute *the precincts of which We have blessed* (*alladhī bāraknā ḥawlah*), is understood to be situated in the Holy Land.

After this report, marked by 'predictions of calamities' (sing. *waʿd*, Q. 17:2–8) visited upon the Banū Isrā'īl who sin despite the scriptural law communicated to them by Moses, a return to the time of the speaker, Muhammad, relates the scripture of Moses to the new scripture, '*hādhā'l-qur'ān*'. This comes first to 'spread good tidings' (*yubashshir*), but also comes to blame humankind in general, who, despite having been given divine directives, behaves unreasonably and rashly (*ʿajūlā*, Q. 17:11) in its relationship with God. Everyone will be given his writting (*kitāb*, now taken in the meaning of an account of deeds, Q. 17:13–14). In addition, a worldly punishment is pending, one that is always brought about – due to divine predestination – through the mighty within a community who causes the destruction of a city (*ihlāk qarya*, Q. 17:16). Eschatological retribution will affect everyone according to his own deeds, even if some may have been more privileged than others in this life (*faḍḍalnāhu tafḍīlā*, Q. 17:21).

Second section (Q. 17:22–81): Decalogue, miraculous and spiritual signs, ritualia of prayer

The second section starts with another enunciation relating to Moses, namely a Qur'anic paraphrase of the Decalogue (Q. 17:22–39), introduced and ending with an appeal to worship God alone (see also Q. 17:2).[57] This rendition of the Decalogue, as well as that of the temple history in *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, figures uniquely in the Qur'an. The former, not explicitly related to Moses, may be intended to serve an immediate need of the community: to be reminded of the

oneness of God and his binding norms. For, somewhat abruptly, thereafter follows a polemic address to the opponents of the Prophet, which takes a central discourse of the closely related sura, *Sūrat al-Najm* (in particular Q. 53:19–27): the Prophet's insistent refusal to ascribe an angelic rank (*malā'ika*) to the goddesses revered by the pagan Meccans, in keeping with his defiance of any infringement on the worship of God alone (Q. 17:39). In Q. 17:42 the idea is further expanded: a plurality of gods would threaten the predominance of one God reigning solely, *'. . . they would have sought a way unto the Lord of the Throne'* (*ibtighā' sabīl*, Q. 17:42). Such an assumption is proof of arrogance (*ʿuluww kabīr*, Q. 17:43; see also the reference in Q. 17:4 to the Banū Isrā'īl), and it is rejected with a hymnic-apotropaic exclamation, *subḥāna* (Q. 17:43; also see Q. 17:1). The polemical debate about the problem of revelation proceeds from the Qur'anic idea that God himself imposed the inability to understand upon the unbelievers, who deride the Prophet, denouncing him as bewitched (*masḥūr*, Q. 17:47) – a stereotypical polemic against his prophethood (see also Q. 25:8) – and who provocatively demand a fixed time for the awakening of the dead (Q. 17:51). As a consolation, the Prophet is cleared of the responsibility for being a guardian (*wakīl*, Q. 17:54; see also Q. 17:2) to them. God alone knows about all creatures in heaven and on earth and it is for Him alone to grant privileges/preference (*tafḍīl*, Q. 17:55; see also Q. 17:21) to individual prophets over others. Even the powers invoked along with Him are in need of Him, they are *seeking the means to come to their Lord* (*ibtighā' al-waṣīla*, Q. 17:57; see also Q. 17:42). A worldly punishment, the destruction of a city (*ihlāk qarya*, Q. 17:58; see also Q. 17:16), will surely strike all of them before Judgement Day, thus it has been fixed in the book of predestination (*kitāb*, see also Q. 17:4).

Thereupon, the question of divine signs (*āyāt*) is explicitly addressed: the response to these has always been unbelief, be they conspicuous signs like the camel stud (she-camel, Q. 17:59, the sign of Ṣāliḥ, the messenger dispatched to Thamūd; a reference to the older texts Q. 91:13 and Q. 54:28); or allusive ones like the *vision that We showed thee* [*Muhammad*] (*al-ruʾyā'llatī araynāka*, Q. 17:60; see also Q. 17:1: *that We might show him some of Our signs*); or simply Qur'anic images like that of the 'cursed tree' of hell (bearing satans' heads as fruit, a reference to Q. 56:51–5). All this should serve as a test (*fitna*), to inspire respect or even fear, but it only increases obstinacy (Q. 17:60). The rebellious stance taken by the adversaries is the effect of the assignment given to Satan by God Himself, namely to inspire man forcefully to revolt (*istifzāz*, Q. 17:64, a reference to the account of the deal made in heaven between Satan and God, first related in Q. 15:30 onwards). He has, however, no power over the faithful servants of God, that is, the Qur'anic community, since for them God is the

reliable guardian (*wakīl*, Q. 17:65; see also Q. 17:2). With reference to Q. 17:67, the believer should consider that it is solely God, not the other powers invoked, who can rescue humans from trouble at sea. Insomuch as people respond to their rescue with ingratitude (*kafūr*, see also Q. 17:2), God should also be credited with the power to bring about a catastrophe, which no guardian (Q. 17:68; see also Q. 17:2, 54 and 65) can prevent. Human beings are from the beginning favoured over other creatures by divine providence (Q. 17:70; see also Q. 17:21 and 55). They will therefore render account on the Day of Judgement and [*receive their*] *book in* [*their*] *right hand* (*kitāb*, Q. 17:71; see also Q. 17:13–14).

Once more, with a clear reference to the self-deception temporarily suffered by Muhammad regarding the authenticity of a particular revelation, an experience that is traditionally connected with *Sūrat al-Najm*, the Meccans are accused of grave transgression. They are charged (as they had been before – e.g., Q. 68:9) with having urged the Prophet (*iftān*, Q. 17:73, see also Q. 17:60: *fitna*) to invent a revelation.[58] This charge would have been of lethal consequence for him had he not, thanks to divine support, remained steadfast. Furthermore, they are reprimanded for ongoing attempts to force him out of the country (*istifzāz*, Q. 17:76; see also Q. 17:64), attempts that would have fateful consequences for themselves. The second section ends with an appeal to hold daily liturgical services, two ritual prayers and a vigil, so as to attain a superior rank (*maqāman karīmā*, Q. 17:79). A particular formula of prayer is recommended that pleads for divine benevolence, for the exit (*makhraj*) and entry (*mudkhal*) related to the desired spiritual dispatch to that rank (Q. 17:80). A movement away from the accustomed space thus has positive connotations, in contrast with the three references to attempts at expulsion (Q. 17:64, 76 and 103), movements that have a negative association. This positive departure experience is strikingly in line with the liberating journey recalled in Q. 17:1.

Since this somewhat enigmatic verse (Q. 17:80) about the exit–entrance movement is without a parallel in the Qur'an, it can hardly be interpreted in eschatological terms.[59] It appears, however, in this given context of a prayer, to be a reference to the worshipper's exit from and re-entry into the profane realm. This psychic movement into a sacred realm, the state of sacredness (*iḥrām*), is ritually enacted by a preparatory gesture of taking up a direction of prayer towards a remote sanctuary and uttering 'God is great' (*Allāhu akbar*). The verse might therefore be intended as a plea for a similarly profound experience of an exit from the profane and entry into the sacred world, as occurred in the *isrā'*, which is assumed to be still fresh in his memory.

Third section (Q. 17:82–111): Confirmation of the revelation, controversies about prophetic signs

The concluding section begins with an observation of the effect that the Qur'an has on the believers, on the one hand, and on transgressors, on the other, lamenting the ingratitude (*kafūr*, Q. 17:89; see also Q. 17:67; see also *'ajūl* (impatience), Q. 17:11–12) of humans. This is followed by the provoking queries about the spirit (*rūḥ*) as a mediator of revelation (Q. 17:85; see also Q. 19:17 and Q. 26:193, where *rūḥ* figures as mediator instead of an angel). These questions can be answered by Muhammad in coded form only: revelation depends on God alone, who can deprive him of the messages mediated through the spirit, leaving him without a guardian (*wakīl*, Q. 17:86; see also Q. 17:2, 54, 65 and 68) to ward off a divine punishment. But, irrespective of the mysterious way of mediation, the imparted word speaks for itself as a clear sign: even if spirits and men united, they would not be able to bring about a *qur'ān* like this (Q. 17:88). Still, the positively recognisable sign of the uniqueness of the Qur'anic recitation does not satisfy the unbelievers. They voice further challenges, calling for miraculous signs ranging from the production of a source of water (Q. 17:90), perhaps an allusion to a miracle worked by Moses (see Exodus 17:6 and Q. 2:60), to the act of an ascension to heaven (*ruqiyy*, Q. 17:93), from where Muhammad should bring down a 'book' (*kitāb*), that is, a complete scripture rather than single revelations arriving gradually. This, perhaps, is an oblique reference to Moses ascending the mountain to meet God whence he returned with the tablets – an event often understood as the bringing down of the law. The claim is rejected vehemently, again with a hymnic-apotropaic exclamation, *subḥāna* (Q. 17:93; see also Q. 17:1 and 43), pointing to the Prophet's merely human nature. It would be meaningful to dispatch angels (*malā'ika*, Q. 17:95) as messengers only if the community itself were a host of angels. Signs (*āyāt*, Q. 17:98; see also Q. 17:1, 2 [scripture to Moses], 59 and 60) are plentiful; he who remains an infidel will suffer punishment in the world beyond.

Again, a section focusing on Muhammad is followed by a passage on Moses. Nine signs (Q. 17:101) had been given to Moses but had been answered by Pharaoh, the leader of the infidels, with mockery and derision. Moses, not unlike Muhammad, was accused of being bewitched (*masḥūr*, Q. 17:101; see also Q. 17:47). The unbelievers defied Moses as they defied Muhammad, by insisting upon retaining their idolatry and, not unlike Muhammad's adversaries, trying to expel him from the country (*istifzāz*, Q. 17:103; see also Q. 17:64 and 76, a reverse image of the exodus, which is always presented as *asrā/isrā'*). These earlier transgressors, however, received punishment while yet living, whereas the Banū Isrā'īl were given land to inhabit until the second

prediction of a calamity (*waʿd*, Q. 17:104; see also Q. 17:5 and 7) came to pass. The story of Moses and the Banū Isrāʾīl, as recorded in the third section of *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ*, ends where it began: at the temple in Jerusalem (Q. 17:104), the same place to which Muhammad's enigmatic translocation, recorded in Q. 17:1, had led him.

The topic of confirmation of the revelation to Muhammad, familiar as the closing of a sura since the middle Meccan period, forms the end of the third section. Once again, Muhammad's role as simply a transmitter of good tidings (*mubashshir*, Q. 17:105; see also Q. 17:9) and a warner (*nadhīr*) is stressed. The sign that is divinely communicated to him is the *qurʾān* itself, a message that he should recite distinctly and slowly to the community, and which is sent down to him in the right, 'adequate' way (*ḥaqqan*), that is, as a series of successive communications, not as a complete volume of scripture or tablets handed to him during a miraculous ascension to heaven (see also Q. 17:93). Whether it meets with belief or disbelief on the part of the pagan Meccans is secondary to the importance of adherents to the earlier revelations accepting it with due respect, praising God with the hymnic exclamation *subḥāna* (Q. 17:108; see also Q. 17:1, 43 and 93) for His fulfilment of a promise (*waʿd*). The final passage is dedicated to issues related to prayer. These include a discourse on the equality of the divine names Allah and *al-raḥmān* as addressees in prayer, and an exhortation to perform the liturgy of prayer, which should not be uttered too loudly or softly, and in which God's uniqueness (Q. 17:2, 22 and 39), His exaltedness above humankind with respect to procreation (Q. 17:40), and His sole regency should figure as themes of praise. The liturgy should also contain a repeated evocation of God's greatness (a multiple *takbīr*). In these rulings, we can easily identify significant elements of the ritual prayer as it was later set forth for the community: thus, the divine names Allah and *al-raḥmān* alternate in the communal prayer *al-Fātiḥa*,[60] which is the opening of the liturgy. The *takbīr* serves as the formula for the worshipper's entrance into the state of sacredness maintained throughout the prayer; it is also repeated several times during the prayer itself. Finally, the question of the performance of liturgy in a loud or soft voice becomes relevant if a communal prayer service involving multiple worshippers is intended. It is such a communal service to which the end of the sura obviously refers.

Progress of the canonical process: *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* and its nucleus, *Sūrat al-Najm*

Sūrat al-Isrāʾ begins, in perfect accordance with *Sūrat al-Najm*,[61] with a spiritual experience by Muhammad that is *sui generis*. After the two visions reported there, which may be located in Muhammad's own surroundings – though

probably experienced as extraterritorial – (Q. 53:1–18; see also Q. 81:19–21), the night journey of *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* unfolds a new geography that reaches beyond the local horizons to include the religious centre of the Banū Isrāʾīl and the locations of the experiences of Moses, their leader. The understanding that the *āyāt* revealed to Muhammad relate to the rite of prayer (an interpretation enhanced by the two types of narrative commentary on the verse, irrespective of their different approaches to myth and history) accounts for the spiritual aura that surrounds the destination of Muhammad's nocturnal journey, the Jerusalem temple, which was the orientation of prayer for Muhammad's monotheistic contemporaries, at least the Jews. The sura ends, like *Sūrat al-Najm*, with a reference to the rite of prayer. Much like the final extended version of *Sūrat al-Najm*,[62] *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* must be viewed as having emerged under the still powerful impression of a narrow escape from peril: the danger of blending the divine message with human desires.

However, *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* takes a very different position on the *āyāt* than does *Sūrat al-Najm*: like Moses, who had also been induced through powerful signs to take up his mission (Q. 20:9–22), Muhammad received miraculous *āyāt*. The two visions from *Sūrat al-Najm* that may have been Muhammad's initiation are evoked anew, if only indirectly, through an almost verbatim repetition of the closing phrase of the second report (compare Q. 53:18 and Q. 17:1; and see also Q. 20:22 where the second sign is announced to Moses). Muhammad's visions are complemented by the new experience, related to the exodus prototype that directly involves Moses, of the movement towards the *masjid* of the Banū Isrāʾīl. Like Moses before him, Muhammad journeys to a sacred space where he receives divine signs, tokens of his personal closeness to God. Like Moses, Muhammad earns only derision, being ridiculed as bewitched and threatened with expulsion from the land. Like Moses, no more than a human warner, he too has received a scripture to be recited, the Qur'an. The experience recalled at the beginning of the sura, the vision (*ruʾyā*) of divine *āyāt* which is referred to again in Q. 17:60, unlike that of *Sūrat al-Najm*, does not refer to a vision of the Prophet in the sense of an intimate encounter with God, nor does it imply a mythic ascent of the Prophet to a place where he can be received by God; rather, it refers to his translocation into a sacred topography located in the Holy Land where God's prophets have worked. The experience focuses on the Prophet's adherence to the realm of the Biblical prophets. It is – unlike the situation in *Sūrat al-Najm* – less an initiation into a new relation with the divine Lord than an entrance into the territory and thus the community of the Biblical prophets.

The Prophet is aware that he cannot meet the challenge of the Meccans to perform the miraculous acts they demand, such as an ascent to heaven which

was achieved by Moses. His communication with God takes place, as is expressed in *Sūrat al-Muzzammil*, either in vigils, where revelations come down to him in portions, in the right way (*ḥaqqan*), or in the ritual of prayer. It is in the context of such a prayer period during a performance that is in itself a temporary exit from the world that he appears to have been granted the divine reward of the night journey, the imagined exodus, to that central point where the prayers of monotheistic worshippers converge to ascend to God.

Sūrat al-Isrā' and other early polemical texts about prophethood

Sūrat al-Isrā' continues a debate which had already dominated the later suras of the early Meccan period and especially those of the middle Meccan period: the discussion of the origin and transmission of the revelation.[63] After the evidence about the two visions produced in *Sūrat al-Najm* and *Sūrat al-Takwīr* apparently aroused doubts among pagan listeners (Q. 53:12), a new point of contention emerges: the question of whether the angels were really responsible for the transmission of the message (Q. 81:19–21). The Prophet is thus urged to produce not only those angels (Q. 15:7, Q. 17:92) but even God himself (Q. 17:92), perhaps with reference to the claims implied in the visions mentioned in *Sūrat al-Najm*. What remaining evidence can meet the unbelievers' demand now that even the supernatural signs granted to the Prophet have failed to convince them of the seriousness of his message? Already in the early Meccan sura Q. 52:34, in an attempt to reject the charge of having invented revelations, the idea is voiced that the revelations speak for themselves and betray their supernatural origin: *Then let them bring a discourse like it, if they speak truly* (*fal-ya'tū bi-ḥadīthin mithlihi in kānū ṣādiqīn*). This argument is, in Q. 17:88, sharpened into a statement on the inimitable character of the Qur'an: *Say: 'If men and jinn banded together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they would never produce its like . . .'* (*Qul la-ini'jtamaʿati'l-insu wa'l-jinnu ʿalā an ya'tū bi-mithli hādhā'l-qur'ānī lā ya'tūna bi-mithlihi*). The recitation itself becomes an *āya*, a sign, confirming its superhuman origin.[64] *Sūrat al-Isrā'* reflects the perception that signs, more precisely those accessible to rational control, are sufficiently available. Accordingly, the Qur'anic reflection of the *isrā'* experience – whose earlier public promulgation had, according to Islamic tradition, met with so little acknowledgement by the Meccans – is no longer used as an apology, as were the reports of the visions in *Sūrat al-Takwīr* and *Sūrat al-Najm*; rather, it is publicised in the triumphant form of a hymn. The sura as a whole reclaims the proportions existing between miraculous and simple scriptural *āyāt*, proportions that had been blurred by the provocative demands of the unbelievers. The vision or dream experience (*ru'yā*) is not what counts; rather, the divine word speaks for itself.

There is, however, one other important argument adduced to enhance the reality of one divine communication enjoyed by the Prophet: the ritual of prayer (*ṣalāt*) as it takes shape in the middle Meccan period. Here, a glance at *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* proves useful. This text, which opens with antagonistic challenges to produce those angelic mediators to whom the vision account in *Sūrat al-Takwīr* has alluded, refers in its final part to a distinctly different kind of *āya*. It reassures the Prophet that he has at his disposal not only the Qur'an, the growing corpus of texts for recitation, but also the seven oft-repeated verses (*sabʿan mina'l-mathānī*, Q. 15:87), that is, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*,[65] the core of the communal prayer. This should be understood as a decisive advantage that the harassed community possesses over those who, by their worldly possessions and power, are inspired to act arrogantly.[66] The argument that there is a confirmation of prophethood implied in the achievement of a distinct prayer formula recurs twice in *Sūrat al-Isrā'*. At the end of the second section, the exhortation to pray at three different times combines with the plea for a particularly blessed sequence of movements, an exit and an entrance that are otherwise unknown in the Qur'an. In my view this can most plausibly be explained as an exit from and a subsequent re-entrance into the profane realm. To accept this interpretation, one would have to presuppose that the later canonised elements of the *takbīr al-taḥrīm*, that is, the formula *Allāhu akbar* marking the worshipper's entrance into the state of sacredness and thus the beginning of the ritual of prayer, already belonged to the service in Meccan times. The experience of a new achievement, then, would be clearly reflected in the triumphal tone of the final statement of the sura, which asserts the idle has given way to the essentially true (Q. 17:84).

The powerful evidence, implicit in the rite of prayer, for the authenticity of the divine origin of Muhammad's message is taken up again at the end of the sura, where a unique scene from a prayer service is evoked: adherents of the earlier scriptures bow down weeping from the impact of the recitation of the Qur'an (Q. 17:107–9). This reminiscence leads to a discourse on the technicalities of conduct while praying. It is to be uttered at a medium level of volume and should encompass particular contents, maybe even particular texts. The hymnic introduction of the adjuration 'Praise belongs to God!' (*al-ḥamdu li'llāh*) reminds one of the *Fātiḥa*, while the ensuing enumeration of elements sounds like a paraphrase of *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*. At the end, there is the call to utter the *takbīr*, the formula demanded for the exit (see also Q. 17:80) from the profane state into that of the sacred and vice versa.

This allusion in Q. 17:80 to the imaginary departure from the profane space for an entrance into the sacred realm brings us back us to the notion of the *qibla*. The state of sacredness can be viewed as the attainment of that

particular destination which had been sought with the facing of the *qibla* leading to His house, the converging point of all prayer. The symbolic direction (*qibla*) is thus pursued spiritually by the praying person. A vision (*ru'yā*) of the sacred sphere, an exodus (*isrā'*) to the focal point of prophetic tradition itself, does, of course, go beyond that experience. It remains a unique event whose frame can perhaps best be explained psychologically as a unique dream experience of the Prophet that continues his conscious act of directing himself towards Jerusalem at the beginning of prayer, but whose modalities remain concealed.

What seems to be triumphantly resounding in Q. 17:1 is the Prophet's and the community's overwhelming perception that they are not only in the possession of a scripture to recite, the Qur'an, but also of the constitutive elements of a communal prayer service. These consist of the introit prayer, the *Fātiḥa*, already celebrated as a novel accomplishment in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, and of a sequence of ritual formulas of verbal and body language that begins with the gesture of facing the *qibla* to initiate the exit from the profane into a state of sacredness. Thus, at this stage of the community's formation, the Prophet has been able to enhance substantially his already achieved function as a warner (*nadhīr, mudhakkir*) and herald of good tidings (*mubashshir*), that is, a human mouthpiece of a divine revelation. He has become the founder and leader of a cultic ceremony that fosters the coherence of the covenantal community. He can thus rightly claim the rank of apostle (*rasūl*) (Q. 17:15, Q. 17:93), equal to the earlier prophets.[67]

Part V: Plain and Mythologising Exegesis – *Isrā'* vs. *mi'rāj*

Q. 17:1 in Western research

After these reflections, it may appear surprising that not only the branch of Islamic tradition that later became dominant, but also most Western research, which is based chiefly on the fundamental study by Horovitz (1919), has interpreted Q. 17:1 not as the experience of a nocturnal journey of the Prophet to the Jerusalem sanctuary, but rather as an ascension of the Prophet to heaven. The arguments presented to support this view will be briefly re-examined in light of the results reached by the preceding textual analysis of *Sūrat al-Isrā'*.

According to Horovitz, 'nobody would have thought to connect *al-masjid al-aqṣā* with Jerusalem had this interpretation not been suggested by the Islamic tradition. The fact that European research, too, has accepted it without prior re-examination proves that it has not yet freed itself from the spell of

Islamic tradition.' The credit goes to Bernhard Schrieke, Horovitz insists, 'for having broken the spell for these particular texts and having realised that "the remotest *masjid*" (*das 'fernste Masǧid'*) is not to be sought in Jerusalem nor anywhere else on earth, but in heaven'.[68] Upon this basis, Horovitz attempted to prove that a heavenly sanctuary was the final point of Muhammad's nocturnal journey. His argument is based on linguistic and typological similarities that exist among the three passages in the Qur'an (*Sūrat al-Takwīr, Sūrat al-Najm* and *Sūrat al-Isrā'*) that deal with extraordinary spiritual experiences of Muhammad, and on the parallels found in Biblical and apocryphal literature. Since he proceeds from the hypothesis (without attending to the aforementioned redactional problematic reflected in the beginning of the sura) that Q. 17:1 'has no connection to the following whatsoever',[69] he cannot use the corpus of the sura as an elucidating context for the first verse, and thus remains dependent upon external evidence. He has at his disposal both the hadith that views the ascension to heaven (*mi'rāj*) as the climax of the *isrā'* experience and older texts that ascribe ecstatic experiences to salvation history figures in the other Abrahamic religions. This latter material, with its copious evidence for ascension experiences, supports the *mi'rāj* version rather than the interpretation that it was a translocation to Jerusalem in a dream, for which there would be no more than a single parallel.[70]

Horovitz's assertion that the 'idea of an ascension towards heaven kept Muhammad's mind busy' appears rather questionable, however, since no more than four Qur'anic passages, two Meccan and two Medinan, touch upon the subject.[71] They are certainly over-interpreted by Horovitz. The oldest evidence should be Q. 15:14–15:

> 14 *Though We opened to them a gate in heaven,*
> *and still they mounted through it,*
> 15 *yet would they say, 'Our eyes have been dazzled;*
> *nay, we are a people bewitched!'*[72]

Irrespective of the hyperbole marked by the use of the *irrealis*, the merely hypothetical statement, as a rhetorical *ultima ratio* that expresses the utmost degree of divine inclination to communicate with man, Horovitz tries to connect this passage directly to Muhammad: 'The Prophet wants to say that his compatriots would believe in the ascension to heaven of former men of God, but thought the ascension of the Prophet in their midst to be a mere deception of his senses.'[73] This illustration of disbelief, however, refers not to an experience of Muhammad's but to demands of the infidels, as is shown unambiguously by Q. 17:90–3:

90 *They say, 'We will not believe you till*
thou makest a spring to gush forth from the earth for us
...
93 *... or till thou goest up into heaven;*
and we will not believe thy going up
till thou bringest down on us a book that we may read'[74]

Horovitz' reading of Q. 17:93 as an indirect confirmation of an ascension – 'They want to see with their own eyes the heavenly book which Muhammad should bring to them as proof of his stay in heaven'[75] – is possible only because he ignores its direct context, which ends in a clear rejection (of such an ascent) by the Prophet: *Say: 'Glory be to my Lord. Am I aught but a mortal, a Messenger?'* (*qul subḥanā rabbī, hal kuntu illā basharan rasūlan?* Q. 17.93). Given this explicit rejection of an ascension as inappropriate for a human messenger, it is not surprising that the further verses adduced by Horovitz as evidence for the hypothesis of Muhammad's ascension only confirm this negative result. Q. 6:35 reads:

And if their turning away is distressful for thee,
why, if thou canst seek out a hole in the earth,
or a ladder (sullam) in heaven, to bring them some sign
but had God willed, He would have gathered them to the guidance;
so be not thou one of the ignorant[76]

If this verse were to be taken as evidence for a factual ascent to heaven, it would also have to be read as evidence for Muhammad's search for a hole in the earth to impress the Meccan unbelievers with a supernatural sign. Finally, Q. 6:125 reads:

Whomsoever God desires to guide,
He expands his breast to Islam;
whomsoever He desires to lead astray,
He makes his breast narrow, tight,
as if he were climbing to heaven (yaṣṣaʿadu).
So God lays abomination upon those who believe not.[77]

The verse has no connection whatsoever to the Prophet. Rather, the metaphor of the ascension as an image for a situation of extreme pressure has negative connotations and is related to obstinate unbelievers. Therefore, it is all the more remarkable that it is precisely the ensemble of these two elements – the widening of the breast and ascension to heaven – that in the mythologising hadith comes to constitute the twin tradition of the Prophet's initiation and his

ascension, encountered earlier *in nuce* (see the section entitled 'The Nocturnal Journey ...' in part III). Horovitz's conclusion from his consideration of the Qur'anic texts is therefore difficult to accept: 'Muhammad's ecstatic ascension to heaven as an experience of his prophetical career can be taken for granted on the basis of his self-testimony [that is, the Qur'an].'[78] Horovitz's work remains valuable as a basic study of the traditional Islamic descriptions of the ascension, although it does, contrary to the reservations expressed in the initial quotation from his essay, eventually concede that the interpretation of Qur'anic evidence can gain immediately from consulting the exegetical tradition: 'The fact that Islamic tradition directly connects the ascension of Muhammad to the night journey to Jerusalem that is deduced from Q. 17:1 can be viewed as a proof that it has preserved the memory of the correct interpretation of this Qur'anic passage.'[79] Horovitz's study has certainly contributed substantially to the task of putting the ascension accounts of Hadith literature into their appropriate religio-historical context while elucidating them by adducing potential prototypes. It has, however, contributed less to the elucidation of the Qur'anic stance towards miraculous deeds as a means of prophetic persuasion. Horovitz's surrender to the overwhelmingly powerful Hadith literature, contradicting explicit and unambiguous Qur'anic evidence, calls for some basic remarks on the techniques applied in narrative exegetical Hadith. Meanwhile the problem of whether Muhammad's translocation was an ascension or journey seems to be solved: van Ess, in his essay 'Vision and Ascension', has argued convincingly that the image of an ascension of the Prophet is a theological construct. Adducing ample testimonies, not only Qur'anic and Hadith texts, but doctrinal and heresiographical material as well, he has suggested that the interpretation of *isrā'* in the sense of an ascension resulted from an extended theological debate involving popular beliefs, on the one hand, and a strong opposition against anthropomorphism, on the other. For the 'orthodox', the idea of an ascension of the Prophet, a movement of a human towards God, in the end proved easier to accept than that of a prophetical vision, presupposing a divine movement towards man. The *isrā'* thus attracted those images that had previously grown around the complex of the Prophet's visions, whose Qur'anic attestations, contrary to that of the *isrā'*, do bear an affinity to cosmic and other imaginary speculations.

The preconditions of mythologising exegesis: The dissolution of the Qur'anic discourse into isolated elements

Since our vantage point is not exegesis but the Qur'an itself, for us, the hermeneutical question still lingers: How could the Qur'anic text – made up of veritative as well as metaphorical speech – be transformed so profoundly as to

90 *They say, 'We will not believe you till*
thou makest a spring to gush forth from the earth for us
. . .
93 *. . . or till thou goest up into heaven;*
and we will not believe thy going up
till thou bringest down on us a book that we may read'[74]

Horovitz' reading of Q. 17:93 as an indirect confirmation of an ascension – 'They want to see with their own eyes the heavenly book which Muhammad should bring to them as proof of his stay in heaven'[75] – is possible only because he ignores its direct context, which ends in a clear rejection (of such an ascent) by the Prophet: *Say: 'Glory be to my Lord. Am I aught but a mortal, a Messenger?'* (*qul subḥanā rabbī, hal kuntu illā basharan rasūlan?* Q. 17.93). Given this explicit rejection of an ascension as inappropriate for a human messenger, it is not surprising that the further verses adduced by Horovitz as evidence for the hypothesis of Muhammad's ascension only confirm this negative result. Q. 6:35 reads:

And if their turning away is distressful for thee,
why, if thou canst seek out a hole in the earth,
or a ladder (sullam) in heaven, to bring them some sign
but had God willed, He would have gathered them to the guidance;
so be not thou one of the ignorant[76]

If this verse were to be taken as evidence for a factual ascent to heaven, it would also have to be read as evidence for Muhammad's search for a hole in the earth to impress the Meccan unbelievers with a supernatural sign. Finally, Q. 6:125 reads:

Whomsoever God desires to guide,
He expands his breast to Islam;
whomsoever He desires to lead astray,
He makes his breast narrow, tight,
as if he were climbing to heaven (yaṣṣaʿadu).
So God lays abomination upon those who believe not.[77]

The verse has no connection whatsoever to the Prophet. Rather, the metaphor of the ascension as an image for a situation of extreme pressure has negative connotations and is related to obstinate unbelievers. Therefore, it is all the more remarkable that it is precisely the ensemble of these two elements – the widening of the breast and ascension to heaven – that in the mythologising hadith comes to constitute the twin tradition of the Prophet's initiation and his

ascension, encountered earlier *in nuce* (see the section entitled 'The Nocturnal Journey . . .' in part III). Horovitz's conclusion from his consideration of the Qur'anic texts is therefore difficult to accept: 'Muhammad's ecstatic ascension to heaven as an experience of his prophetical career can be taken for granted on the basis of his self-testimony [that is, the Qur'an].'[78] Horovitz's work remains valuable as a basic study of the traditional Islamic descriptions of the ascension, although it does, contrary to the reservations expressed in the initial quotation from his essay, eventually concede that the interpretation of Qur'anic evidence can gain immediately from consulting the exegetical tradition: 'The fact that Islamic tradition directly connects the ascension of Muhammad to the night journey to Jerusalem that is deduced from Q. 17:1 can be viewed as a proof that it has preserved the memory of the correct interpretation of this Qur'anic passage.'[79] Horovitz's study has certainly contributed substantially to the task of putting the ascension accounts of Hadith literature into their appropriate religio-historical context while elucidating them by adducing potential prototypes. It has, however, contributed less to the elucidation of the Qur'anic stance towards miraculous deeds as a means of prophetic persuasion. Horovitz's surrender to the overwhelmingly powerful Hadith literature, contradicting explicit and unambiguous Qur'anic evidence, calls for some basic remarks on the techniques applied in narrative exegetical Hadith. Meanwhile the problem of whether Muhammad's translocation was an ascension or journey seems to be solved: van Ess, in his essay 'Vision and Ascension', has argued convincingly that the image of an ascension of the Prophet is a theological construct. Adducing ample testimonies, not only Qur'anic and Hadith texts, but doctrinal and heresiographical material as well, he has suggested that the interpretation of *isrā'* in the sense of an ascension resulted from an extended theological debate involving popular beliefs, on the one hand, and a strong opposition against anthropomorphism, on the other. For the 'orthodox', the idea of an ascension of the Prophet, a movement of a human towards God, in the end proved easier to accept than that of a prophetical vision, presupposing a divine movement towards man. The *isrā'* thus attracted those images that had previously grown around the complex of the Prophet's visions, whose Qur'anic attestations, contrary to that of the *isrā'*, do bear an affinity to cosmic and other imaginary speculations.

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Since our vantage point is not exegesis but the Qur'an itself, for us, the hermeneutical question still lingers: How could the Qur'anic text – made up of veritative as well as metaphorical speech – be transformed so profoundly as to

fit the diverse needs of the broad spectrum of later disputant groups? Let us therefore briefly return to the different types of exegetical unfolding of the Qur'anic *isrā'*. The two examples of interpretation of Q. 17:1, cited above – the one plain and sober, the other mythologising – demonstrate two basically different approaches to the text. Of these the second, by its very intention, does not aim to elucidate the historical or the discursive context at all. While the plain exegesis tries to provide a plausible social and historical framework for the particular text, thus coming close to the genre of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the occasions of revelation), the mythologising exegesis dissolves the Qur'anic statement into its individual elements in order to construct out of these elements subplots and background images. Recall that the reference to the time of night (*laylan*) evoked the deep sleep of the Prophet. Given the local point of the departure (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*), this had to be taken as sleeping in the sanctuary itself, as demanded for the rite of initiation intended in the story. Further, in this expanded exegesis, the epithet of the destination '[whose] precincts we have blessed' evoked the personal presence of the bearers of that blessing, the prophets. The provocative demand for an ascension presented to the Prophet later in the sura evoked the unfolding of his ascension, despite the denial he expressed in his immediate answer to the challenge.

The consistent role of Moses as a prototype of Muhammad in *Sūrat al-Isrā'* was also integrated into the story by narrative exegetical Hadith, but with less extreme deviations from the Qur'anic model. Moses, in the ascension account, became Muhammad's side-figure whose experience as an advisor was appreciated, though renounced in the end.

Finally, we found that a complete sequence of Hadith episodes was based on the mere coincidence of the use of two opposing metaphors that, in their Qur'anic context, are particularly expressive: the widening of the breast, which is a Qur'anic reference to belief; and its tightening to a degree that makes the person feel that he was climbing to heaven, which serves as an image for stubborn unbelief. Consequently, what is simply a set of metaphors in the Qur'an becomes, in the Hadith, the nucleus of a complex account of the Prophet's initiation and ascension.[80] Therefore, two complete subplots emerge: the first comprising two images of a widening of the breast and a cleansing of the Prophet's heart in preparation for the implantation of the gift of prophecy;[81] the second, a miraculous ascension to heaven.

This kind of exegesis is not meant to elucidate the overall discourse of the underlying text; rather, it focuses on individual images which, isolated from their contextual function, invite an elaboration into new narrative units. These, in turn, open the way for further expansions through

new imaginary traits. Mythologised exegesis has as its *raison d'être* a new religiously complex, mythologised image of the Prophet that emerged soon after Muhammad's death,[82] when the awareness of his merely human dimension had become obscured.[83] It is, thus, easy to identify this image as a later construct. Though such a verdict could be rash in the case of the plain narrative commentary which respects the contextuality of Qur'anic texts and therefore can temporarily be read as historically plausible, one should still be aware of its fundamental divergence and thus distance from the Qur'anic text itself.

The Qur'an, as against the biography (*sīra*), does not relate the narrative of a messenger and his fate among his community; rather, it reflects a complex communication process, involving a number of *dramatis personae*, themes, developments and tenets. Its many voices, bridging vast spatial and chronological distances, clearly resound with the urgency of accepting a novel notion of time as the framework for human interactions. It is this discursive character of an ongoing debate, the striking phenomenon of Qur'anic self-referentiality – so widely lost in narrative commentary – that characterises inner Qur'anic commentary. The subsequent unfolding of the discourse through the successive growth of the scripture clearly reflects the parallel process of the emergence of a community relying on the development and refinement of a coherence-generating cult. Tracing these double processes of emergence – the scriptural and the cultic – demands a close contextual reading of Qur'anic texts, a reading that exhibits respect for the Qur'an as a literary corpus claiming integrity and consistency. Taking this heuristic premise seriously, we have tried here to promote a microstructural approach to the Qur'an rather than following the macrostructural project that dominates present Qur'anic research.

From the elaborate textual edifice of the Qur'an, an edifice that becomes fully recognisable only when viewed through the microstructural perspective, it appears that individual elements were expounded upon by exegetes soon after the closure of the corpus. These exegetes, inspired by more complex religious anticipations than those held by the Qur'anic *dramatis personae* (i.e. the early community), reused these elements as *spolia*, as remains, in the occasionally fantastic structure of a mythologised history of the Prophet. Hadith literature still promises important new insights into early Islamic history; it should not, however, block us from seeing the sober Qur'anic discourse, which, given our present state of knowledge, should be assigned priority over other texts as evidence of the twofold canonical process, the emergence of an Islamic scripture and the development of an Islamic cult.

NOTES

1 For the emergence of particular ornamental epithets for Islamic cities and regions, see Ernst Gruber, *Verdienst und Rang: Die* Faḍā'il *als literarisches und gesellschaftliches Problem im Islam* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1975). The triple epithet can be traced as far back as the Ayyūbid era. It is cited by the preacher Zakī al-Dīn in his sermon in praise of the reconquest of Jerusalem by Saladin; see Abū 'Abbās Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-abnā' al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut, 1970), IV, p. 232. An English translation is given by William M. de Slane, *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary* (Paris, 1842), II, pp. 636–7.

2 See Ibrāhīm Zayd Kīlānī, 'Makānat al-Quds fī'l-Islām' (Unpublished lecture given during The Third International Conference on the History of Bilād al-Shām [al-Mu'tamar al-dawlī al-thālith li-tā'rīkh bilād al-Shām], Amman, 1980).

3 On the traditions that have emerged since the end of the first/seventh century and have been collected since the third/ninth century regarding the merits of Jerusalem (*faḍā'il al-Quds*), see Isaac Hasson, 'Les "Titres de Gloire de Jérusalem" par Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī' (French introduction), in Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas d'Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Wāsiṭī*, ed. Isaac Hasson (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 7–29; Meir Jacob Kister, 'A Comment on the Antiquity of Traditions Praising Jerusalem', *Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981), pp. 185–6; Shelomo Dov Goitein, 'Jerusalem in the Arab Period (638–1099)', *Jerusalem Cathedra* 2 (1982), pp. 168–96; and, more recently, Amikam Elad, 'The History and Topography of Jerusalem during the Early Islamic Period. The Historical Value of *Faḍā'il al-Quds* Literature: A Reconsideration', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991), pp. 41–70.

4 See Meir J. Kister, '"You Shall Only Set Out for Three Mosques": A Study of an Early Tradition', *Le Muséon* 82 (1969), pp. 173–96; Shelomo Dov Goitein, 'al-Ḳuds', *EI2*, vol. V, pp. 322–39.

5 See W. Montgomery Watt, 'al-Madīna (i) History to 1926', *EI2*, vol. V, pp. 994–8.

6 See Hasson, 'Titres de Gloire'; Emmanuel Sivan, 'Le caractère sacré de Jérusalem dans l'islam aux XIIe–XIIIe siècles', *Studia Islamica* 27 (1967), pp. 149–82.

7 For a detailed discussion of the possible motives for the erection of the Dome of the Rock, see Josef van Ess, "Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: An Analysis of Some Texts', in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns, eds., *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 89–103.

8 A basic revision of the immediate pre-Islamic and early Islamic history was initiated by Crone and Cook in their work *Hagarism*.

9 A significant exception is Josef van Ess' 'Vision and Ascension: *Sūrat al-Najm* and its Relationship with Muḥammad's *miʿrāj*', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1 (1999), pp. 47–62. His study highlights the complex scene of heterogeneous theological trends emerging during the first Islamic centuries and sheds new light on the tensions between the Qur'anic and Hadith discourse.

10 See Paret, 'Koran als Geschichtsquelle'; Peters, 'Quest'. More recently, see Schoeler, *Charakter*.

11 For a discussion of this, see chapter 1, *'Neither of the East nor of the West'*.

12 Rubin, 'The *Kaʿba*', p. 108.

13 Arent J. Wensinck, 'Ṣalāt', in Hamilton A.R. Gibb and Johannes H. Kramers, eds., *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1991), pp. 493–5. For background, see Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, pp. 198–204.

14 Rubin, 'The *Kaʿba*', p. 103, n. 29.

15 Ibid, p. 103, n. 29.

16 The date of the introduction of the Jerusalem *qibla* indicated by Rubin (ibid., p. 103, n. 29) is traceable only in 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya* (Beirut, 1980), I, p. 264. This

date would fit well with the thesis presented here that the assumption of the direction of prayer triggered the night journey of the Prophet to Jerusalem. However, Ḥalabī's ascription of the *qibla* to the time of *Sūrat al-Isrā'* cannot be used as evidence of the simultaneity of the *qibla* and the *isrā'* experience, since it can just as easily have been inspired by their common relation to Jerusalem. Duri ('Jerusalem') dates Q. 17:1 to roughly a year before the *hijra*.

17 Rubin, 'The *Kaʿba*', p. 103, n. 29.

18 Wensinck, 'Ṣalāt'.

19 See Rudolph Sellheim, 'Prophet, Caliph und Geschichte: Die Muhammad-Biographie des Ibn Ishaq', *Oriens* 18–19 (1967), pp. 33–91. For an example of Muhammad's abstention from eating sacrificial meat prior to the canonical prohibition, see Meir J. Kister, '"A Bag of Meat": A Study of an Early "Hadīth"', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33 (1970), pp. 267–75.

20 On a similar concept developed by the pre-Islamic Ḥanīfs, see Uri Rubin, 'Ḥanīfiyya and Kaʿba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of Dīn Ibrāhīm' (Unpublished lecture given at the Third International Colloquium, 'From Jahiliyya to Islam: Aspects of Social, Cultural and Religious History in the Period of Transition', Jerusalem, 30 June-7 July 1985). The Ḥanifī notion, which focuses on Abraham as the prototype of the messenger of God, appears only at the end of the Meccan period. Up until then, Moses held that rank in the communal imagination.

21 See Baumstark, 'Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus'; Goitein, 'Prayer in Islam'; chapter 4, 'Images'.

22 For hadiths presenting this interpretation, see the commentary on Q. 2:143 in Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*.

23 The ascription of these verses to Mecca or Medina is controversial.

24 For proof of the expansion of the community's 'mental map' at Medina, see Neuwirth, 'Geography'.

25 Shelomo Dov Goitein, 'Shemōt Yerūshalayim', in Shelomo Dov Goitein and Joseph Hacker, eds., *ha-Yishuv be-Erets Yiśra'el be-reshit ha-Islam u-vi-tequfat ha-Tsalbanim le-'or kitve ha-genizah* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 32–5; Khalil Athamina, 'Le premier siècle de l'Islam: Jérusalem capitale de la Palestine', in Farouk Mardam-Bey and Elias Sanbar, eds., *Jérusalem: Le sacré et le politique* (Paris, 2000), pp. 115–48; Heribert Busse, 'Jerusalem', *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 2–7.

26 Bekka: Q. 3:96; Mecca: Q. 48:24.

27 *al-Ṭūr* [*the Mount*]: Q. 19:52, Q. 20:80, Q. 28:29 and 46, Q. 52:1; *Ṭūr sīnīn* [*Mount Sinai*]: Q. 23:20, Q. 95:2 (Meccan); *al-wād al-muqaddas Ṭuwā* [*the holy valley, Towa*]: Q. 20:12; Q. 79:16 (Meccan).

28 For allusions to Mecca, see *al-masjid al-ḥarām* [*the Holy Mosque* or *the holy place of worship*]: Q. 17:1, Q. 22:25 (all Meccan) and Q. 2:144, 150, 191, 217, Q. 5:2, Q. 8:34, Q. 9:7, Q. 9:19, Q. 9:28 Q. 48:25 (all Medinan); *ḥaram amīn* [*a sanctuary secure*]: Q. 28:57, Q. 29:67 (both Meccan); *al-Kaʿba*: Q. 5:97 (Medinan); *al-bayt al-maʿmūr* [*the House inhabited*]: Q. 52:4 (Meccan). For allusions to Jerusalem, see *al-mihrāb* [*the Sanctuary*]: Q. 19:11, Q. 38:21 (both Meccan) and Q. 3:37 and 39 (Medinan). Horovitz (*Koranische Untersuchungen*, pp. 13–14) notes the following allusions to Palestine, *al-arḍ allatī bāraknā fīhā* [*the land that We had/have blessed*]: Q. 21:71 and 81, Q. 34:18 (all Meccan); see also *the precincts of which We have blessed* [*alladhī bāraknā ḥawlahu*]: Q. 17:1 (Meccan); *al-arḍ al-muqaddasa* [*the Holy Land*]: Q. 5:21 (Medinan).

29 See Heribert Busse, *Die theologischen Beziehungen des Islams zu Judentum und Christentum: Grundlagen des Dialogs im Koran und die gegenwärtige Situation* (Darmstadt, 1988), pp. 177–200; chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'.

30 The term *masjid* occurs only once in the Meccan period (in *Sūrat al-Kahf*, where it refers to the monument above the cave of the Seven Sleepers). Elsewhere in the Qur'an, when used in the singular, the word denotes the Kaaba.

31 The first verse of this sura has been divided into five cola (a–e).

32 Though the verbal rendering of *asrā* presented in Arberry is not exact, since it does not capture the reference to Moses' exodus, 'nocturnal journey'/'night journey' which is in general use, should be retained. When used with *'ibād*, it refers to the journey of Moses (see Q. 20:77, Q. 26:52, Q. 44:23), otherwise, to the flight of Lot (see Q. 15:65, Q. 11:81). An association with these cases of sudden departure resounds in Q. 17:1. The corpus of the sura refers more than once to a forced departure (Q. 17:76 and 103), but once also to a 'setting forth' with a positive connotation (Q. 17:80).

33 *'Abd* in the singular most often refers to the Prophet; see, for example, Q. 53:18 and Q. 18:1.

34 It is not astonishing that the vision – more precisely the second vision recorded in *Sūrat al-Najm* (Q. 53) – in Islamic exegesis has been related to an ascension of the Prophet, and thus been closely linked to Q. 17:1; see van Ess, 'Vision and Ascension'.

35 See Josef Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', *Der Islam* 9 (1919), pp. 159–83; Paret, *Kommentar*.

36 See Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes* on this sura.

37 A rhyme clause ending in *samīʿan baṣīrā*, which would harmonise with the rhyme of the corpus of the sura, appears twice in the Qur'an: Q. 4:58 and 135.

38 A colon (pl. cola) – a term from classical rhetoric denoting a speech unit that could be articulated in one breath – roughly matches a phrase. For a colometric analysis of the Qur'an, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 117–23.

39 See the list of all Qur'anic rhymes in Neuwirth, *Studien*.

40 For more on the canonical process with respect to this sura, see Part IV in this chapter.

41 For the gradual evolution of topographical attributions, such as individual place names, in connection with a sanctuary, see Gerald R. Hawting, 'The Origins of the Islamic Sanctuary at Mecca', in Gauthier H.A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale, IL, 1982), pp. 25–47.

42 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, XV, p. 3.

43 See Goitein, 'Shemōt Yerūshalayim'.

44 See van Ess, 'Vision and Ascension', where the notion of an ascension is discussed in the context of both the Qur'an and various exegetical trends of the first and second Islamic centuries.

45 Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Eduard Sachau (Beirut, 1960), II, part 1, pp. 142–5; see Heribert Busse, 'Jerusalem in the Story of Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascension', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14 (1991), pp. 1–40.

46 ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo, 1373/1954), p. 402. English translation by Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥaq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Lahore, 1974), p. 181.

47 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, I, p. 398; Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, pp. 181–2.

48 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, I, p. 407; Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 187.

49 Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt'; Geo Widengren, *Muhammad: The Apostle of God and His Ascension* (Uppsala, 1955); Busse, 'Jerusalem'; van Ess, 'Vision and Ascension'.

50 Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', pp. 179–83.

51 Horovitz raises doubts about the direct transferability to the person of Muhammad of the ecstatic practices which Bernhard Schrieke ('Die Himmelsreise Muhammeds', *Der Islam* 6 [1915], pp. 1–30) assumes to have been common among the pre-Islamic *kāhins* (Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', p. 165). Still, Horovitz retains the possibility that, through ascetic practices, Muhammad might have reached an ecstatic disposition sufficient for the experience of a spiritual ascension. However, in view of Muhammad's outright rejection of such supernatural faculties, this is quite problematic.

52 See Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*; Dohmen and Oeming, *Biblischer Kanon*. For a more elaborate presentation and application of the approach, see chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

53 On the dominant role of Moses as the Qur'anic prophetic prototype, see Goitein, 'Ramadan', and the more recent study by Michael Zwettler, 'A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of "The Poets" and the Qur'ānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority', in James Kugel, ed., *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), pp. 75–119. In accordance with his revisionist theory of the genesis of the Qur'an, Wansbrough (*Quranic Studies*) regards Moses as the model for the creation of an image of Muhammad by the later community. See also the critical re-evaluation of related Qur'anic research by Radscheit, *Die koranische Herausforderung*, pp. 71–4.

54 See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp. 67–9, where he tends to identify the unspecified *'abd* from Q. 17:1 with Moses instead of Muhammad (*isrā'*, then, must be taken as an allusion to the exodus of the Israelites); the argument requires, however, discounting the two topographic indications as later glosses.

55 Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', p. 160.

56 It has been proposed that *al-kitāb* in Q. 17:4 could also refer to a pseudepigraph of the Bible, and thus to what the Qur'an would equally term as scripture, namely the Apocalypse of Abraham, which entails a prophecy concerning the fate of the Jerusalem Temples; see Geneviève Gobillot, 'Grundlinien der Theologie des Koran, Grundlagen und Orientierungen', in Markus Gross and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, eds., *Schlaglichter: Die ersten beiden islamischen Jahrhunderte* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 320–69.

57 For a detailed analysis of the Decalogue, see chapter 9, 'Evil'.

58 These references clearly point to Meccan adversaries rather than to Jews or Jewish Christians as held by Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp. 78–80.

59 In view of the verb 'raise' (*baʿatha*) used in Q. 17:79, Paret (*Der Koran: Übersetzung*) argues for an eschatological interpretation of Q. 17:80 which is hardly convincing in the context of the performance of prayer.

60 See chapter 6, '*Fātiḥa*'.

61 See van Ess, 'Vision and Ascension', who, through a thorough investigation of the exegetical discussion, unfolds hidden dimensions of *Sūrat al-Najm*.

62 On the controversy of the alleged intrusion of the so-called 'Satanic Verses' (Q. 52:33–34, Q. 17:73, Q. 11:13) into the Qur'an proclamation, see Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*, pp. 100–103. For an analysis of the entire sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran: Band I*, pp. 642–85.

63 An essentially new evaluation of the topoi of polemics about prophethood has been presented by Radscheit, *Die koranische Herausforderung*.

64 Wansbrough (*Quranic Studies*, pp. 78–80) considers the argument presented here, pertaining to the challenges to the unbelievers to produce a text for recitation comparable to the Qur'an (the so-called *taḥaddī*-verses), to be a clear proof of the emergence of the Qur'an in a Jewish surrounding. The observation, however, that these verses respond polemically to the charge of the Prophet's invention of a revelation, a charge obviously familiar in Mecca ever since the controversy of the 'Satanic Verses', contradicts such an assumption of a non-Meccan origin of the text. On the problem of the 'inimitability of the Qur'an', see Radscheit, *Die koranische Herausforderung*.

65 See chapter 6, '*Fātiḥa*'.

66 See chapter 7, 'Referentiality'.

67 On the development of the notions of *rasūl* and *nabī* in the Qur'an, see Bobzin, 'Seal of the Prophets' and Radscheit, *Die koranische Herausforderung*.

68 Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', p. 162. See also the accounts discussed by Schäfer, *Ursprünge*.

69 Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', p. 160.

70 In addition to the parallels Horovitz already noted, further material has been produced by Wansbrough (*Quranic Studies*) and Busse ('Jerusalem in the Story of Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascension').

71 See Horovitz's assertion in 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', p. 164.

72 *wa-law fataḥnā ʿalayhim bāban mina'l-samā'; fa-ẓallū fīhi yaʿrujūn (ruqiyy) la-qālū innamā sukkirat abṣārunā bal naḥnu qawmun masḥurūn* (Q. 15:14–15).

73 Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', p. 164.

74 *wa qālū: lan nu'mina laka ḥattā tafjura lanā mina'l-arḍi yanbūʿan, . . . aw tarqā fī'l-samā'i (ruqiyy) wa-lan nu'mina li-ruqiyyika ḥatta tunazzila ʿalaynā kitāban naqra'uhu* (Q. 17:93).

75 Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', p. 164.

76 *wa-in kāna kabura ʿalayka iʿrāḍuhum fa-ini'staṭaʿta an tabtaghiya nafaqan fī'l-arḍi aw sullaman fī'l-samā'i fa-ta'tiyahum bi-āyatin wa-law shā'a'llāhu la-jamaʿahum ʿalā'l-hudā fa-lā takūnanna mina'l-jāhilīn* (Q. 6:35).

77 *fa-man yuridi'llāhu an yahdiyahu yashraḥ ṣadrahu li'l-islāmi wa-man yurid an yuḍillahu yajʿal ṣadrahu ḍayyiqan ḥarajan ka-annamā yaṣṣaʿʿadu fī'l-samā'i ka-dhālika yajʿalu'llāhu'l-rijsa ʿalā'lladhīna lā yu'minūn* (Q. 6:125).

78 Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', p. 169.

79 Ibid., p. 165.

80 The ensemble of narratives given, for example, in book V, hadith 9 of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Ludolph Krehl and Theodor W. Juynboll (Leiden, 1862–1908), has already been criticised as incompatible by Anthony A. Bevan, 'Mohammed's Ascension to Heaven', in Karl Marti, ed., *Studien zur semitischen Philologie un Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift Julius Wellhausen* (Giessen, 1914), pp. 58–60; see also Widengren, *Muhammad*.

81 For a Qur'anic application of the first image to the Prophet, but, again, only in a metaphorical sense, see *Sūrat al-Sharḥ*. On the topos of the cleansing of the heart and the implanting of the gift of prophethood, see Widengren, *Muhammad*; also Harris Birkeland, *The Legend of the Opening of Muhammed's Breast* (Oslo, 1955); Rudi Paret, Review of *The Legend of the Opening of Muhammed's Breast*, by Harris Birkeland, *Orientalische Zeitschrift* 52 (1957), pp. 248–50; repr. in *Der Koran* (Darmstadt, 1975), pp. 278–80; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*.

82 See Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm, 1918) and Sellheim, 'Prophet'.

83 Busse readdressed the subject. His study, based on a rich source of material from Hadith traditions as well as non-Islamic religious texts, focuses on the genesis and development of both narrative complexes. However, he completely overlooks the function of the *isrā'* account with respect to the growth of the Qur'an as a scripture and the growth of the Islamic cult. It is thus not surprising that the Qur'an does not figure as the focal point of the *isrā'* discussion, but remains in the background as a mere collection of traditions, albeit a particularly prominent one, an approach very much in line with the concepts developed by Busse ('Jerusalem in the Story of Muhammad's Night Journey and Ascension', p. 3): '[S]everal versions of the journey to heaven exist in the Hadith literature, the story told in Surah 17, 1 being only one of them. It differs from the account transmitted in the hadith only in the circumstances that it was ascribed a higher degree of authority than the others on account of its inclusion in the Koran.'

9

A Discovery of Evil in the Qur'an? Revisiting Qur'anic Versions of the Decalogue in the Context of Pagan Arab Late Antiquity*

Introduction

'WITH SLIGHT exaggeration one may say that only with Muhammad did sin as the personal appropriation of evil enter the life of him who had remained untouched by Christian, Jewish or Iranian ideas that had been making their way into the Pensinsula, unsifted, confused and confusing.'[1] Von Grunebaum's perceptive statement, although not totally unproblematic, is provocative. It in a way anticipates the central notion that guides the Berlin-based Corpus Coranicum project,[2] that is, to read the Qur'an as a text of Late Antiquity, insofar as it addresses the innovative and revolutionary element that the Qur'an introduces into the horizons of its pluricultural, albeit theologically unfocused, Arabic-speaking society. A problem is, however, posed by von Grunebaum's strict distinction between monotheistically acculturated recipients of the Qur'anic message, on the one hand, and purely pagan audiences, on the other, which today can no longer be upheld. We know next to nothing about the Qur'an's first listeners from historical sources apart from the Qur'an itself. Nevertheless, we do presume that Jewish and Christian teachings were widely disseminated in and around the pre-Islamic Hijaz and constituted an easily accessible stock of late antique knowledge.[3] Most importantly, we view the Prophet together with his audience – the Qur'anic community – collectively as the bearers and transmitters of the prophetic message. After all, it was through the consensus of this community that the concept of sin became an intrinsic element of the new religious movement. A systematic study of this process has yet to be undertaken, however. Most

* This is a revised version of a translation by W. Scott Chahanovich.

scholars who have discussed the problem of sin in the Qur'an approached the text simply synchronously, as a preconceived literary product of an author, Muhammad, or authors working after his death. Hence, such work evinces no concrete understanding of the Qur'an as a text that developed out of an interactive communication process between the messenger, his community and their opponents. Such a development is, however, clearly traceable. In view of the fact that the Qur'an was communicated within a very short time span, lasting approximately twenty years, it is entirely possible – as it is necessary – to trace the essential stations the emerging community passed by on their way to achieving consensus about what was to constitute the Qur'anic message.[4]

For our purposes, only a small part of this development can be discussed. For several reasons we will not start with the oldest texts, but rather jump headfirst into the middle Meccan period of the communication. First, any mention of evil and iniquity in the earliest verses tends to be little more than phraseological references to Jewish and Christian scriptural topoi. For example, Q. 99:8: *and whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it* (*wa man ya'mal mithqāla dharratin sharran yarah*) offers a metaphor regarding the measuring of evil deeds, which mirrors topical Biblical imagery without exemplifying what evil (*sharr*) entails. Chronologically early talk of evil and injustice, therefore, seems all too text referential and hence does not offer much help in tracing the roots of the community's own awareness of the topic. Similarly, the early Meccan retribution stories are not helpful either. It is true that these narratives justify the punishment of those who have committed acts of evil and transgressed against God, yet they go no further than accusing people of iniquity for the sacrilegious repudiation of God's message (*takdhīb*) as conveyed by His messengers. No doubt, this is a theodicy in a nutshell. But while the Biblical models like Jeremiah 52:2 or 2 Kings 24:19 speak of men who 'did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord' and go on unfolding their evil deeds, in the early Qur'anic texts the evil for which the peoples are destroyed is limited to their rejection of monotheism only.[5] The concept of evil is, thus, not concretely factored into the earlier Qur'anic suras.

The eschatological debates at first glance promise to be more fruitful: God's justice manifests itself in His promise to provide commensurate recompense in the afterlife for deeds done during one's earthly life. The criteria of the divine judgement are often enumerated in catalogues of virtues and catalogues of vices or sins.[6] However, since monastic expectations of piety often lurk behind these litany-like lists of good and bad deeds, they are somewhat limited in scope, touching only on select aspects of social life.[7] What will be judged,

according to these lists, are ritual neglect, greed and, above all else, contempt for the eschatological message.

To verify von Grunebaum's thesis, we must therefore go beyond this narrow textual radius. For such an undertaking, we need a different medium: a text that functions like a prism, collecting and refracting diverse forms of religious and moral (dis)qualifications, and which at the same time takes up a new position towards the older traditions. In fact, such a text is extant in the oldest Decalogue of the Qur'an, which was the first text to provide a programmatic catalogue of commandments and prohibitions. Furthermore, signalled by unmistakable formulas of authorisation, it presents itself as a binding ethical manifesto.

One reason for choosing the Decalogue as our prismatic text stems from sheer pragmatism: the Qur'anic Decalogue opens up possibilities for comparison. 'Seen from ethic-historical perspectives', Friedrich Wilhelm Graf has observed, 'the Decalogue proves to be a superior projection surface for variously articulated normative frameworks, of which particular elements are refracted, such as cultural experiences, organisational political interests (*Ordnungsinteressen*), claims to power, salvific hopes and depictions of Divine sovereignty.'[8] Such organisational interests, claims to power and salvific hopes are also grounded in the Qur'anic Decalogue. However, in the Qur'an there is not only one version of the Decalogue, as there is in the Bible where two only slightly diverging forms affirm each other, but three distinct versions, each of which was communicated at a different stage of Muhammad's ministry.[9] These versions display far more differences than the two Biblical versions from Exodus 20:2–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. The first, middle Meccan version is introduced as a striking novelty, bearing the function of a textual manifesto (Q. 17:22–39). As against that, the late Meccan version serves a more modest function as an exhortative reminder of a particular core message shared by the Bible and the Qur'an (Q. 6:151–3), while the Medinan version presents the matrix for a polemic directed against Medinan Jews (Q. 2:83–5). Additionally, there are several isolated references to the commandments with respect to the exclusive veneration of God and the duty to care for parents (Q. 31:13–14, Q. 29:8, Q. 46:15) as well as other relatives and dependent persons (Q. 4:36). However, while the middle Meccan Decalogue functions as a striking signal, a new ethical manifesto, the Decalogue overall later becomes something slightly different: in the early Medinan context, the commandments are introduced to revise or emend false religious priorities. In later Medina, finally, they even serve to demonstrate the failure of a covenant. By discussing these three texts, it will be possible to attempt to draw some elementary conclusions concerning the conception of evil and sin in the Qur'an.

Evil in the Qur'an: Previous Scholarly Approaches

A systematic analysis of the phenomenon of evil in the Qur'an still remains a desideratum.[10] Stefan Wild provides a brief and general overview of basic Qur'anic attempts to address the notion of evil.[11] In his short survey on the Qur'anic approaches to the phenomenon of evil he highlights some dimensions that have remained unregarded in the Qur'an, stressing that there is no concept of original sin and, therefore, no need for salvation. He also points out that the Qur'an is in want of a clearly elaborated theodicy. Wild's analysis is, however, based on rather late Qur'anic texts that primarily focus on *al-shayṭān*/Satan who, in the creation narrative, plays a key role in bringing about the first human couple's initial transgression. However, as Whitney Bodman has shown convincingly,[12] these texts that focus on *al-shayṭān*/Satan project only one side of the multifaceted scenario of the temptation narrative which, no less importantly, also features a kind of tragic hero, Iblīs, who in the Qur'an only later merges with the figure of *al-shayṭān*. This figure – belonging to God's heavenly entourage – is a tester in the Ancient Near Eastern understanding. For his refusal to bow down before the newly created Adam, he is cursed by God, but is given respite and charged with the mandate to test man through seduction. Since his severe punishment in the Qur'an is not altogether plausible (given the fact that the demand to exalt a being other than God Himself – which he defied – is in conflict with a strict understanding of monotheism), it does raise questions about God's justice and thus triggers a Qur'anic, and later Islamic, debate of theodicy. The narrative of the first couple's transgression instigated by *al-shayṭān* (who is established in the later suras as the standard agent of seduction) also, for another reason, does not provide much conclusive information about the perception of evil: man's first sin in the Qur'an does not suggest a true break in human history; it neither marks mankind's entrance into a new stage of epistemic development nor even tangentially touches on the status of Adam as the theological anti-figure of Christ. As van Ess has demonstrated, the theological axiom of original sin associated with the story of creation in Christian tradition is not found in the Qur'anic texts. Satan's temptation of the first human couple in the Qur'an remains, to use the words of van Ess, merely an 'episode'.[13] Though it is an indisputable fact that the Qur'an, from a certain stage of development onwards, does connect the existence of evil in the world with the machinations of Iblīs/*al-shayṭān* and his hosts, it is a theologically diffuse notion of evil, generally having to do with disobedience, where there is no notion of personal sin attached to human misbehaviour. The primordial narrative about Adam's transgression, which in the three earlier Qur'anic accounts serves to

underscore diverse admonitions, culminates only in a fourth ultimate version with a clear theological message: it focuses on the risk God took in creating a sin-prone Adam and dispatching him as His deputy on the earth.[14] This risk is, however, not related to Satan's impact on Adam nor to Adam's bent to disobey, but to man's natural inclination towards violence and the shedding of blood.

As indicated by the initial citation, we are indebted to von Grunebaum for catalysing the debate about the nature of evil in the Qur'an.[15] Von Grunebaum's interest lies in the 'Qur'anic turn', that is, in the novel achievement of the Qur'anic message in contrast to the mass of other traditions circulating at the time which were theologically unfocused.[16] He refrains, however, from systematically pursuing the trail of his discovery, such as the striking fact that already in middle Meccan times there existed a term for sin, *khaṭī'a* – obviously a technical term used in Christianity[17] – even though this notion seems to have had little impact on the Qur'anic discourse about evil.[18] Von Grunebaum, furthermore, does not sufficiently differentiate between the scope of evil reflected in the Qur'an and later theological understandings of evil.

The Qur'anic Decalogue

The first version: The middle Meccan Decalogue

The earliest specimen of the Qur'anic Decalogue, Q. 17:22–39, belongs to the middle Meccan period. This developmental phase, which attests to the community's attainment of a new identity of their own, is constitutive for the entire Qur'anic message. Preceded by a longer period of liturgically focused textual production, these suras present a stage where the message of the imminent Day of Judgement had already polarised the listeners into either followers of the new religious paradigm or obstinate opponents.[19] One might claim that the adherents of the new movement increasingly withdrew into a kind of inner exile in order to escape the tension from within their pagan environment and, subsequently, constructed a new identity centred on notions inspired by Biblical salvific history.[20] This development is liturgically expressed in the adoption, at this time, of the Jerusalem *qibla* as the first direction of prayer.[21]

Gradually, the growing community became more aware of their status as a new offshoot of God's chosen people, walking in the footsteps of the Banū Isrā'īl whom Moses had guided out of Egypt.[22] The Banū Isrā'īl were now perceived as the community's spiritual ancestors; pagan tribal identity, built on the authority of genealogical bonds, *nasab*, now became replaced with a spiritual identity.[23] Importantly, Moses became the prototype of the messenger, whereby the most significant aspects of Moses' life and deeds were relived by

Muhammad. Thus, for example, Moses' calling (Exodus 3:4–6) is re-enacted in one of Muhammad's visions (Q. 53:7–12).[24] Also, Moses' experience of liberation during the exodus is reflected in Muhammad's translocation, facilitated by God, to the furthest mosque, *al-masjid al-aqṣā*, in the heart of the Holy Land (Q. 17:1).[25]

A sura in which the parallelisation between Moses and Muhammad attains a continuous pattern is *Sūrat al-Isrā'*,[26] where we also find the oldest version of the Qur'anic Decalogue (Q. 17:22–39). Although this text neither explicitly declares itself to be the Decalogue nor points out Moses as the transmitter, its structure nevertheless signals that it is a new proclamation of the well-known and authoritative Biblical text.

Hirschfeld was the first to identify the text and its later re-workings as a Qur'anic Decalogue.[27] Speyer, on the other hand, suffices with subsuming dispersed Biblical-sounding commandments under the heading 'Decalogue' without acknowledging the existence of the actual Decalogue module in the Qur'an.[28] Hirschfeld's discovery is most relevant, although he takes the view, which was widely shared in the scholarship of his time, that Qur'anic texts are more or less faithful reproductions of Biblical material. He therefore understands the first version, Q. 17:22–39, as a purposeful reproduction of Exodus 20:1–17 and the two subsequent versions as later redactions. He also puts forward convincing arguments to explain the absence of particular Biblical commandments from the Qur'anic catalogue. Thus, the missing prohibition of the uttering of God's name, in his view, is due to the community's contrary practice of frequently referring to God by his various names (*dhikru'llāh*), a practice which is explicitly recommended in the Qur'an. As to the absence of the commandment to observe the Sabbath, Hirschfeld refers to (later) Qur'anic explanations that the Sabbath was imposed as a punishment, as attested in Q. 16:124, for example.[29] Although he clearly discerns the primary intention underlying the first Qur'anic Decalogue, which is 'to adapt the Decalogue as far as possible to the customs and needs of the Arabs',[30] he does embark on a contextualisation of individual Qur'anic commandments with their Biblical counterparts. Hirschfeld also discusses the second (Q. 6:151–3) and third (Q. 2:83–5) versions of the Qur'anic Decalogue, trying to explain their peculiar deviations from the first version by embedding them in their respective *asbāb al-nuzūl*, their *Sitz im Leben*.[31]

In view of this extremely fruitful and thought-inspiring investigation of the Qur'anic Decalogue, it is deplorable that later studies have not built on it and have even ignored it.[32] Attempts at an analysis of the Qur'anic Decalogue have more recently been undertaken by William M. Brinner (1986),[33] Stefan Schreiner (1987),[34] Hans Zirker (1999),[35] Karl Prenner (2002)[36] and Sebastian Günther

(2007).[37] For varying reasons, with the exception of Brinner's work, these studies contribute little to our specific query regarding the discovery of evil and its association with sin. Günther's contribution breaks new ground for research on the Decalogue in Qur'anic exegesis, yet dealing very little with the Qur'an itself it is not pertinent to our precise topic. Zirker and Prenner are unaware of Hirschfeld's identification of the Qur'anic texts with the Decalogue and their chronological arrangement; both achievements are also ignored by Paret in his commentary (1971).[38] All of them also ignore Brinner. Zirker's synchronic study focuses not on the first version of the Decalogue but the later Meccan one, in spite of Hirschfeld's unambiguous statement about the sequence of the versions. It compares the Qur'anic texts with the Biblical Decalogue in Exodus 20:2–17,[39] but it does so without paying attention to the peculiar way in which that text was negotiated in the Qur'an. In the case of Prenner, he limits himself to a detailed explanation of the elements mentioned in the commandments in Q. 17:22–39 without taking an interest in the subsequent versions.

Schreiner, in contrast, tries to demonstrate that, 'Muhammad had the Biblical Decalogue, which he knew well, in mind as he was in the process of composing the Muslims' new code of conduct.'[40] Schreiner thus explicitly adopts the highly problematic thesis that Muhammad was the sole author of the Qur'an, who possessed a comprehensive knowledge of Biblical sources and was following a premeditated religio-political intent. What further detracts from the value of Schreiner's findings is his disregard of the body of textual-historical research, that has appeared since the work of Hirschfeld, favouring a diachronic reading of the Qur'an. Like Zirker, he considers *Sūrat al-Anʿām* (Q. 6) the oldest version of the Decalogue, probably because it comes before *Sūrat al-Isrā'* (i.e. Q. 17) numerically in the standardised print text. It is Brinner who is, by far, most profoundly interested in the function of the Decalogue within its respective sura texts. Although focusing on Islamic tradition, Brinner contextualises the Qur'anic texts with post-Biblical tradition. His substantial merit is, however, that he was the first to clearly discern the references to Moses in the suras under scrutiny and identify them as indices of a contest between Muhammad and Moses. He thus paid tribute to the textual politics of the Qur'an; his presentation, however, is somewhat compromised by his lack of distinction between Qur'anic expression and the *sīra* interpretation of some decisive facts. Let us now turn to the middle Meccan version of the Decalogue itself.

Q. 17:22–39:

22 *Set not up with God another god, or thou wilt sit condemned and forsaken.*

23a *Thy Lord has decreed you shall not serve any but Him, and to be good to parents,*
b *whether one or both of them attains old age with thee;*
c *say not to them 'Fie' neither chide them, but speak unto them words respectful,*
24a *and lower to them the wing of humbleness out of mercy and say;*
b *'My Lord, have mercy upon them, as they raised me up when I was little.'*
25a *Your Lord knows very well what is in your hearts if you are righteous,*
b *for He is All-forgiving to those who are penitent.*
26a *And give the kinsman his right, and the needy, and the traveller; and never squander;*
27b *the squanderers are brothers of [the satans], and Satan is unthankful to his Lord.*
28a *But if thou turnest from them, seeking mercy from thy Lord that thou hopest for,*
b *then speak unto them gentle words.*
29a *And keep not thy hand chained to thy neck, nor outspread it widespread altogether,*
b *or thou wilt sit reproached and denuded.*
30a *Surely thy Lord outspreads and straitens His provision unto whom He will;*
b *surely He is aware of and sees His servants.*
31a *And slay not your children for fear of poverty; We will provide for you and them;*
b *surely the slaying of them is a grievous sin.*
32a *And approach not fornication; surely it is an indecency, and evil as a way.*
33a *And slay not the soul God has forbidden, except by right. Whosoever is slain unjustly,*
b *We have appointed to his next-of-kin authority; but let him not exceed in slaying;*
c *he shall be helped.*
34a *And do not approach the property of the orphan save in the fairest manner, until he is of age.*
b *And fulfil the covenant; surely the covenant shall be questioned of.*
35a *And fill up the measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance;*
b *that is better and fairer in the issue.*
36a *And pursue not that thou hast no knowledge of;*
b *the hearing, the sight, the heart – all of those shall be questioned of.*

37a *And walk not in the earth exultantly; certainly thou wilt never tear the earth open,*
b *nor attain the mountains in height.*
38 *All of that – the wickedness of it is hateful in the sight of thy Lord*
39a *That is of the wisdom thy Lord, set not up with God another god,*
b *or thou wilt be cast into Gehenna, reproached and rejected.*

In spite of not explicitly citing the Mosaic model and its numbering of the ten commandments, the cluster of verses in Q. 17:22–39 are noticeably a manifesto-like proclamation, as is revealed by its introduction which uses a formula that unmistakably confers authority: *Thy Lord has decreed (qaḍā rabbuka)*.[41] From the start, the Qur'anic commandments are divinely authorised. What follows can indeed be described as a catalogue of ten commandments if one accepts the following approximate parallels: Q. 17:22–23a as the first commandment (Exodus 20:3–5), Q. 17:23b–25 as the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12), Q. 17:33 as the sixth commandment (Exodus 20:13), Q. 17:32 as the seventh commandment (Exodus 20:14), Q. 17:35 as the eighth commandment (Exodus 20:15) and Q. 17:36 as a modified version of the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16). In place of commandments two to four (the prohibition of taking God's name in vain, the sanctification of the Sabbath, the ban of images) and ten (the banning of covetousness), four other articles are introduced: caring for relatives and the needy (Q. 17:26),[42] desisting from infanticide (Q. 17:31), caring for orphans (Q. 17:34) and, lastly, enjoining modesty (Q. 17:37).[43] Evidently, the auspicious number ten does not really matter numerically in the list of divine commandments displayed here. Thus, a number of commandments are fanned out into additional injunctions through a kind of commentary. Yet, the Qur'an by adopting the authoritative genre of a catalogue does give the impression, albeit subtly, that its own unique list of divine injunctions was adapted to form a counterpart to the Bible's Ten Commandments.

The local tint of some of the Qur'anic commandments is difficult to overlook, particularly when these go beyond the Mosaic commandments. For example, the injunction against infanticide in Q. 17:31, which was already implicitly condemned in the early Meccan sura Q. 81:8–9,[44] directly addresses a local custom that was still practised at the time of the Prophet.[45] Another example is the *lex talionis* (law of retribution) whose specific conditions of application are mentioned here for the first time in Q. 17:33. Flamboyant behaviour, cherished by pagan society and a topos of the poet's self-representation in ancient Arabic poetry, is proscribed in Q. 17:37. Some of the principles expounded in the Qur'anic Decalogue which run fundamentally

parallel to the Mosaic text, such as the honouring of one's parents (compare Exodus 21:17) and the practising of fairness and honesty in social interactions, may be assumed to have been common precepts also familiar to the pagans listening to the Prophet. The disapproval of injustice in social interaction, such as unfairly weighing and measuring in Q. 17:35 (compare Leviticus 19:35), had already been expressed in such early Meccan texts as Q. 83:1–3. Thus, content-wise, nothing is necessarily new, with the exception perhaps of the injunction against sexual promiscuity clad in a Biblical term, *zinā*.[46]

Yet, the Qur'anic Decalogue does deserve to be recognised as the signal of a groundbreaking innovation. True, in Q. 17:22–3a the commandment to have faith in the one God (*tawḥīd*) – which, since the outset of the proclamation, encapsulates the core of the Qur'anic communication, much like in its Biblical archetype – not unexpectedly features at the beginning of the Decalogue. The lengthy directive to respect one's parents in Q. 17:23b–c, however, disrupts the frame of expectation. The notion of *raḥma* (mercy), so prominent here, recalls the divine promise of *ḥesed, raḥamīm* (mercy) in Exodus 20:6 that will be granted, for several generations, as a reward for strict adherence to monotheism. In the Qur'an, believers are enjoined at length to surrender emotionally to parents who have grown old and dependent and to pray for God's intercession for their sake. The charitable, and even spiritual, dimensions of this commandment clearly remind listeners of the message in the chronologically closely related sura, *Sūrat Maryam*, about the Holy Family – Mary, Jesus, Zachariah and John. There, the notion of *raḥma* and related concepts play an essential role, as can be seen in Q. 19:12–13: *We gave him . . . / tenderness* (*wā ātaynāhu . . .; ḥanānan*); Q. 19:14: [*he was*] *cherishing his parents* (*barran li-wālidayhi*) and Q. 19:32: [*he has enjoined me*] *to cherish my mother* (*barran li-wālidatī*). Accordingly, mercy is brought to the fore in Q. 17:24: *out of mercy . . . have mercy upon them* (*mina'l-raḥmati . . . irḥamhumā*) and in Q. 17:28: *seeking mercy* (*ibtighā'a raḥmatin*). The interiorisation of the commandment concerning respect for one's parents clearly signals a new consciousness, a newly developed individual responsibility for one's conduct in life. Stroumsa has alerted us to a related new consciousness in early Christianity, that of the 'care of the self' (*epimeleia heautou*), a notion ultimately going back to late antique philosophical teaching, which he recognises as a characteristic of late antique piety.[47] This new interest in the individual – including his or her emotional gifts and needs – which is also to be found in some of the contemporaneous Arabic poetry is strikingly mirrored in our particular verse. What points to a similar direction is the Qur'anic inclusion of not only close and distant relatives but, equally, of the unrelated poor in the circle of recipients of charity. In the Qur'an, what was previously

merely an encouragement to care for orphans (Q. 93:6, 8; Q. 90:14–15; Q. 107:1–2; Q. 89:17) has now attained the status of an actual commandment in the Qur'anic Decalogue. This new emphasis attests that the identity of the emerging community, which had been previously grounded in tribal genealogy, has at this stage mutated into a religious identity based on piety that transcends blood-based bonds.[48] This is another innovation that fits with Stroumsa's description of religious mutations of Late Antiquity.[49]

A quick look at the consequences conjured in the Qur'an as punishment for not heeding the commandments leads to an astonishing discovery. Initially, it seems as though the disobeying of certain divine injunctions carries the threat of sanctions within this world; thus the transgression of the commandment in Q. 17:22 to exclusively worship the one God appears to bring about social exclusion: *or thou wilt sit condemned and forsaken* (*fa-taq'uda madhmūman makhdhūlā*). This would have sounded familiar to contemporary listeners since at the time of the communication, this warning was a standard argument in the vehement debate carried out in poetry about how to deal with property. The verse evokes the words uttered in ancient Arabic poems by the *'ādhila*, the female reproacher, a fictitious counter-figure of the poet hero,[50] whose function it is to reprimand the flamboyant and boastful hero with pragmatic arguments. Her rebuke focuses primarily on the hero's wasteful inclinations that will ultimately drive him to social ruin. A comparable injunction against overspending, followed by a menace equally figures in Q. 17:29–30. Profligacy in pre-Islamic poetry is depicted as leading only to poverty and, thereby, social isolation. In Q. 17:22 polytheism – next to improvidence – is presented as a similar trigger of blame and isolation. Yet, in the Qur'anic context the isolation is not to be understood as a mere loss of social status; what is at stake is the fate of the transgressor on Judgement Day. Recognising the eschatological association is essential; the isolation prophesied here is that which had already been predicted for sinners in such early Meccan suras as Q. 80:33–7 and Q. 70:8–14,[51] and made explicit shortly before the Decalogue, in Q. 17:18. The pagan *'ādhila* intertext is not, however, completely devoid of function. It enables the Decalogue to present itself in a medium that would have been recognisable and comprehensible to listeners familiar with the pagan values, among which excessive generosity was considered a means to acquire prominence and, indeed, live on in the memory of one's clan or tribe. The Qur'anic Decalogue's strategy – of drawing upon both the Biblical Decalogue text and the poetic topoi in order to formulate norms to be heeded by a Meccan society that was monotheistically inclined but still accustomed to receiving messages through poetry – has to be acknowledged as a particularly effective strategy for appropriating authority.

In the same vein, we find a reference to the satans/Satan in Q. 17:26–27: . . . *and never squander,/the squanderers are brothers of* [*the satans*]*, and Satan is unthankful to his Lord* (. . . *wa-lā tubadhdhir tabdhīrā; inna'l-mubadhdhirīna kānū ikhwāna'l-shayāṭīni wa kāna'l-shayṭānu li-rabbihi kafūrā*). Lavishness is the behaviour of Satan's followers, 'the brothers of the satans'. Satan, here, is not a reference to the evil one in Christian understanding, but rather one of the demons (*jinn*), who, according to pre-Islamic belief, inspire the poets and who are thus partly responsible for the exalted heroic world view of the *jāhiliyya* expressed in poetry. The single Satan mentioned at the end of the verse evokes an episode narrated in the middle Meccan sura, Q. 15:26–48, and summarised in Q. 17:61–5, where one of the demons, Iblīs, is commanded by God to bow before man but refuses. As a punishment he is cursed but subsequently given respite and designated 'tempter of men'. Iblīs is fully identified with Satan for the first time in Q. 20:115–23, a text slightly earlier than Q. 17:61–5. Interestingly, *shayṭān*/Iblīs uses as a means of temptation that which man is implicitly warned against succumbing to in the Decalogue: pride in one's accumulated possessions – the foundation of individual self-aggrandisement which is attained through *jūd*, or *karam* (i.e. generosity); and a throng of descendants – the basis for the equally discredited pride in one's genealogy, *nasab*. The Satan mentioned in the Decalogue represents misguidance, achieved through the very pagan ideals that the Decalogue seeks to extirpate; he is not, however, depicted here as the hypostasis of evil.

It is ultimately poetry's anthropocentric world view, wherein heroic man autonomously rules over his own world, that serves as the foil for the values being promoted in the Decalogue. The Qur'an's commandments condense all relevant social directives in order to create an integral mould, one in which old pagan norms are negotiated and contextualised with new ascetic or Biblical norms to form a new, cohesive canon of values. To characterise this new legislation, one has to highlight its theocentric perspectives: God alone supplies provisions (*rizq*, Q. 17:30, 31); God is also essential for helping man to succeed in his vengeful goals (Q. 17:33). This is a direct and audacious interference in what had been considered, in pagan society, the domain of the hero: the dispensation of goods and the handling of the tribal *lex talionis*. This divine interference deprives the act of killing of its heroic dimension: the vengeful individual no longer commits revenge on his own, but rather *shall be helped* (*innahu kāna manṣūrā*, Q. 17:33).

What is new in this catalogue, then, is foremost its theological dimension. Rules of honesty already acknowledged as markers of respectable social standing are raised to the level of divine laws. Even such tribal-oriented paradigms as the *lex talionis* are taken away from man and imputed to God.

Through the sacralisation of socio-behavioural rules, the anthropocentric world view of pre-Islamic Arabia is unrooted. This all takes place from the vantage point of a new kind of piety. The catalogue of commandments is no longer exclusively imprinted with God's omnipotence, but, equally, with human responsibility. Hence, the act of infanticide cited in the early Meccan *Sūrat al-Takwīr*, Q. 81:8–9: *when the buried infant shall be asked/for what sin she was slain* (*wa-idhā'l-maw'ūdatu su'ilat; bi-ayyi dhanbin qutilat*), now constitutes a sinful act in the Decalogue (Q. 17:31).

In Jewish and Christian tradition, the individual privileged with the transmission of the commandments is Moses. The Qur'anic Decalogue itself does not ascribe the text to Moses, but since we can assume that his unique relationship to the text was common knowledge to the listeners (Moses' receiving of the tablets is recorded in the Qur'an in a fashion that presupposes the listeners' previous familiarity with the event, see Q. 20:80), we sense his presence, even without his name being adduced. It is, moreover, clear that it is Moses' achievement of transmitting the law which furnished the challenge that the sura responds to. The sacred journey which Moses undertook to meet God can be viewed as the precursor to Muhammad's nocturnal translocation, which resulted in his sanctified authorisation to proclaim the Qur'anic message. As has been shown earlier,[52] the first verse of *Sūrat al-Isrā'* alludes to a sort of exodus of Muhammad, a translocation to a blessed and sacred place where he was graced with a relevant divine communication. This is presented as an experience not unlike that of Moses who was given the tablets on a high mountain close to the divine presence.[53] The expression used to denote Muhammad's translocation (*isrā'*), however, points not to an ascension but to a horizontal movement; there is no need to engage in miraculous journeys when a geographical site sacred to the elect people is available in reality. In other verses, *isrā'* twice refers to Lot's flight (Q. 15:65, Q. 11:81) and three times to Moses' exodus (Q. 20:77, Q. 26:52, Q. 44.23). Q. 17:1 thus entails an unmistakable reference to Moses. It is no surprise, then, that Wansbrough even considered Q. 17:1 to be referring to a translocation experienced by Moses himself.[54] The verse is immediately followed by a statement about Moses' transmission of the scripture, *al-kitāb*, as a means of guidance, leading over to a short review of the history of the two Jerusalem temples, called *masjid*, in Q. 17:4–8. This is a unique historical-political section which, in contrast to the familiar pattern of Qur'anic narrative history, focuses not on historical figures but a particular site: the Jerusalem temple. It thus reconnects to the site visited by the proclaimer during his translocation to the Holy Land, *al-masjid al-aqṣā* (Q. 17:1). The missing link that elucidates why the Prophet's destination point was the temple in Jerusalem is, however, found not in the text but in the

community's new ritual orientation: their adoption of the Jerusalem *qibla*. It was the community's unmistakable aspiration to become part of the monotheistic salvation history of the Banū Isrā'īl – a goal clearly expressed in the orienting of the *qibla* towards the Israelites' sanctuary, the Jerusalem temple. The account of the destruction of the temple sounds like an indirect critique of Moses' failure to guide his people along the right path (see Q. 17:3–7). The politics of supersession – the community's desire to eclipse the Banū Isrā'īl and to show that the privileges extended to Muhammad matched or even exceeded those granted to Moses – is in full swing.

The second version: The early Medinan Decalogue

The early Medinan Decalogue,[55] found in Q. 6:151–3, is directly related to Moses, whose receiving of the complete scripture (*thumma ātaynā Mūsā'l-kitāba tamāman* . . ., Q. 6:154) is attested in the immediately ensuing verse. Both manifestations of the law – the commandments and the scripture – have by this time merged. The text itself no longer needs to be emphatically introduced, since by the early Medinan period it had long been known among the audience. Thus, the messenger need only remind his listeners of the previously communicated commandments. In contrast to the earlier version, this particular text is explicitly presented as the ceremonial recitation (*atlu*, Q. 6:151) of a catalogue of prohibitions that are considered sacred (*mā ḥarrama rabbukum ʿalaykum*). There is little space for positive commandments; these concern the treatment of parents (Q. 6:151), the practice of honest measuring (Q. 6:152) and giving true witness in testimony (Q. 6:152). The second version of the Decalogue is framed within the context of controversy with undetermined opponents, perhaps both Jewish and pagan detractors, over what is divinely forbidden. The focus is less on correcting individual behaviour than on reminding listeners of what is really essential among the divine prohibitions and commandments. The text is meant to steer the disputants away from marginal, casuistically oriented questions, such as dietary issues, and towards the heart of the divine prohibitions and commandments. The text is as follows:

Q. 6:151–3:

151 *Say: 'Come, I will recite what your Lord has forbidden you:*
that you associate not anything with Him,
and to be good to your parents,
and not to slay your children because of poverty;
We will provide you and them
and that you approach not any indecency outward or inward,

and that you slay not the soul God has forbidden, except by right.
That then He has charged you with; haply you will understand.
152 *And that you approach not the property of the orphan,*
save in the fairer manner, until he is of age.
And fill up the measure and the balance with justice.
We charge not any soul save to its capacity.
and when you speak, be just,
even if it should be to a near kinsman.
And fulfil God's covenant.
That then He has charged you with; haply you will remember.
153 *And that this is My path, straight;*
so do follow it, and follow not divers paths
lest they scatter you from His path.
That then He has charged you with; haply you will be godfearing.'

Though the text, due to its obviously ceremonial performance (Q. 6:151: *Come, I will recite . . . taʿālaw atlu . . .*), is much more emotive than the first, it presents, in terms of content, little more than a summary of the earlier Decalogue. Hence, those elements of the previous Decalogue that had signalled its novelty as a Biblical supersession of the pagan ethical canon are herein no longer necessary. Only infanticide and excessive practices of vengeance are condemned a second time; and, once, tribal-based impediments to justice are openly criticised (Q. 6:152: *And when you speak, be just, even if it should be to a near kinsman*, *wa idhā qultum faʿdilū wa-law kāna dhā qurbā*). The entire text thus appears to be a mere recapitulation of the Biblical Decalogue – perhaps indicating another reason why modern scholars have focused on this rather than the earlier version. New emphasis, however, is placed elsewhere: thrice – each time in the final phrase of the verse (i.e. its *clausula*) – the commandments are solemnly referred to as *waṣiyya* (*dhālikum waṣṣākum*, Q. 6:152), a correlate of the Biblical and Jewish *miṣwah*, meaning 'binding commandment'. Some provisions are elucidated specifically, such as caring for orphans, giving true witness in testimony and weighing justly. The commandment of modesty is notably absent. As a result, the catalogue here has only nine commandments. The Decologue is followed by a juxtaposition of the two revelations given to Moses and to the proclaimer, which puts both on the same level:

Q. 6:154–6:

154 *Then We gave Moses the* [*Scripture*], *complete for him who does* [or *did*] *good,*
and distinguishing every thing,

and as a guidance and a mercy:
haply they would believe in the encounter with their Lord.
155 *This is a [Scripture] We have sent down, blessed:*
so follow it and be godfearing;
haply so you will find mercy.[56]

The Decalogue has become an emblem of both Moses' and Muhammad's prophethood.

The third version: The later Medinan Decalogue

The text of the later Medinan Decalogue (Q. 2:83–5) is framed by a polemic. It begins with a reference that evokes the historical account of Moses receiving the commandments in the context of a covenant. What matters, however, is not the figure of Moses but that the original receivers of the Decalogue, the Israelites, from whom the contemporary Jews (equally regarded as receivers of the text) were descended, are called on to render account of why they had forsaken the commandments.

Q. 2:83–5:

83 *And when We took compact with the Children of Israel:*
You shall not serve any save God;
and be good to parents, and the near kinsman,
and to orphans, and to the needy;
and speak good to men
and perform the prayer, and pay alms.'
Then you turned away, all but a few of you, swerving aside.
84 *And when We took compact with you:*
'You shall not shed your own blood,
neither expel your own from your habitations';
then you confirmed it and yourselves bore witness.
85 *Then there you are killing one another,*
and expelling a party of you from their habitations,
conspiring against them in sin and enmity;
and if they come to you as captives, you ransom them;
yet their expulsion was forbidden you.
What, do you believe in part of the [Scripture], and disbelieve in part?
What shall be the recompense of those of you who do that,
but degradation in the present life,
and on the Day of Resurrection to be returned
unto the most terrible of chastisement?
And God is not heedless of the things you do.

In this text, for the first time, the Decalogue is explicitly placed in the Biblical context of the covenant made at Mount Sinai,[57] such that now the commandments appear as originally God's address to the Banū Isrā'īl. The section is obviously part of an anti-Jewish polemic whose political context cannot be satisfactorily reconstructed in our narrow context. The catalogue is limited to three commandments: believing in God; caring for one's parents, relatives, orphans and the poor; and speaking justly. To this list are added the religious pillars of prayer and almsgiving, which are binding injunctions in both Judaism and nascent Islam. At the end of the first long verse, it is stated that a majority of the addressees have transgressed God's norms. However, the 'majority' herein intended is obviously not the Qur'anic community as such, but the descendants of the Banū Isrā'īl, that is, the Qur'anic community's Jewish neighbours.[58] This observation is further confirmed in the following long verse, Q. 2:84, in which the covenant with God is again addressed to the second person plural 'you', but complemented by new directives: the prohibition of inter-tribal bloodshed and the proscription of driving one's own tribal relatives from their homes. Offences derived not from Biblical tradition but from contemporary forms of misbehaviour are obviously elevated to the level of infringements of the Decalogue commandments, and are used as instruments in a polemic strategy. One of the reproaches, the derision of the half-hearted acceptance of scripture – they accept a part of it, yet disregard another part – can be identified as a standard topos of anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics.[59] The instrumentalisation of the Decalogue as an argumentative tool for proving the disloyalty of the Medinan Jews towards their own covenant is reference to the increasing tendency of the community to hold their Jewish opponents accountable according to their own scripture, and by extension their own religious standards.

Evil as Disobedience? A Problematic Matrix

In light of these Qur'anic Decalogue texts, can we confidently assert that the Qur'anic community discovered evil as a new moral concept, or even that they developed a distinct awareness of personal sin? No easy answer is possible. A firmly established term for sin is not traceable in any of the texts. Only the earliest Decalogue makes an attempt to judge transgressions against divine law; for example, by stating that a particular behaviour is disdained (*makrūh*) by God, or referring to it as an error (*khiṭ'*) or as something bad/abominable (*sayyi'*). It is this first version alone, which is not yet connected to polemic, that deserves attention as a prism through which communal awareness is refracted. Here, for the first time, a set of deeds and forms of behaviour is

marked as abominable in God's eyes, and therefore ultimately entailing the revocation of eternal life.

Although all commandments are directed against the pagan mindset and values and the pre-Islamic attitude of excessively seeking to assert oneself, one should, however, be careful of immediately subscribing to von Grunebaum's view of the Qur'anic concept of evil. According to von Grunebaum, triumphing over the powerful pagan norms was only possible by disempowering man and placing the re-appropriated power into the hands of the one God. Sin, newly identified as the individual's 'encroachment into God's domain of power', was to be overcome only via absolute obedience. Von Grunebaum further contends that this simplified solution closed the door to a deeper understanding of the problem, to the notion that evil lies within man's nature:

> (But) in bringing his people face to face with sin, Muhammad blurred the confrontation by disconnecting, as it were, evil from the nature of man. Monotheism in its sternest understanding, the deity as sole agent and judge, his omnipotence protected so to say by a monopoly on liberty which given the limitations of human comprehension that He had ordained must result in a sense of arbitrariness and resigned if gladly conceded submission on the part of man – strictly speaking autonomous moral existence found itself projected into and limited to the divinity. The divinity alone determined good and evil, today's ruling not necessarily but only habitually prejudging tomorrow's, the transfer to the human universe transposed the choice between the good and the bad as such to one between obedience and disobedience. Sin became rebellion. But beyond the revolt against a set of commands whose fulfilment is as much a test of submissiveness as a sensible conforming with directions toward Paradise, the Koran does not suggest a structural vision of evil.[60]

The actual conception of evil in the Qur'an which, though nowhere systematically presented, is, however, more complex than von Grunebaum suggests, and was negotiated in diverse contexts that were sometimes ambiguous.[61] It seems that von Grunebaum's conclusion applies more to the thinking of the later prevailing Ashʿarī school of theology than to the immediate Qur'anic context, as Bodman's characterisation of the Ashʿarite attitude towards evil demonstrates:

> In this system, al-Shayṭan is not the cause of evil; God ultimately causes evil and mortals immediately cause it. Al-Shayṭan serves only to lure us to the many attractive alternatives to the straight path (*al-ṣirat al-mustaqim*). Since good and evil cannot be discerned by reason and cannot be examined in

> those terms, the only question is that of rightly perceiving what God has commanded in any situation. In essence, in this view, there is no fundamental theology of evil in Islam. Instead, there is a theology of submission.[62]

This way of thinking, however, should not be confounded with the Qur'anic self-expression. It would be an oversimplification to presume that the personal appropriation of evil, understood as individual sin – or in other words, the individual consciousness of having failed to live up to one's duties as a human being aware of justice and injustice – had not yet transpired in the Decalogue. Though the transgression of the commandments is not explicitly classified as a sin in the Qur'an, righteousness is idealised and penitence is required once someone has fallen short of the accepted norms (see Q. 17:25). Above all, the demand to treat one's neighbours with genuine care and respect is apparent. It is particularly evident in the commandment to honour one's parents, where *raḥma* figures as a gift received that should serve as a challenge to render support to others. *Raḥma* in the Decalogue is highlighted as a quality essential for the fulfilment of the divine will. An analogous idea is also present in the instruction to care for beggars, who, it is stipulated, should at least be consoled with friendly words even if nothing else is given to them. Although this may not be equal to the mandate which in Christian tradition is considered as epitomising all laws (see Matthew 22:35–40; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–8) of 'loving one's neighbour',[63] it nevertheless does provide a powerful catalyst for introspection and facilitates the recognition that one's own humanity is inseparable from that of others. Thus, the order to be established with the Qur'anic Decalogue commandments relies on the principle of God's mercy and – in his service – man's mercy as well; this attitude exceeds mere obedience.

With these references to introspection and care of the self, the Qur'an, even in a legislative text such as the Decalogue, clearly defines itself as a text of Late Antiquity, not, however, in the sense of a sort of Christian apocryphon as some scholars tend to depict it, but rather as a new voice in the concert of debates in Late Antiquity.

NOTES

1 von Grunebaum, *Islam*, p. 9.
2 See the description of the Corpus Coranicum project by Marx, 'Koranforschungsprojekt'.
3 Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London, 2001); James E. Montgomery, 'The Empty Ḥijāz', in James Montgomery, ed., *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One* (Leuven, 2006), pp. 37–97; Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 24–8.
4 For the still prevailing reservations against attempts to undertake a chronological analysis of the Qur'an, as well as attempts to heuristically construct a chronology of the early Meccan suras, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 22–63.

5 See Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, pp. 11–32.
6 For the introduction of the category of the catalogues of virtues and vices (first established in Biblical studies) into Qur'anic studies, see Neuwirth, *Studien*.
7 For further discussion of the catalogues of virtues and vices, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 297–300.
8 Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Moses Vermächtnis: Über göttliche und menschliche Gesetze* (Munich, 2006), p. 51.
9 These texts have been identified as Decalogue texts and have been studied synoptically by Hirschfeld, *Beiträge*, pp. 22–7.
10 For a comparative study by scholars in comparative religion, see Carsten Colpe and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, eds., *Das Böse: Eine historische Phänomenologie des Unerklärlichen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993).
11 Stefan Wild, 'Der Böse und das Böse im Islam', in Klaus Berger, Harald Herholz and Ulrich Niemann, eds., *Das Böse in der Sicht des Islam* (Regensburg, 2009), pp. 53–66.
12 Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblis*.
13 See Josef van Ess, 'The Beginnings of Islamic Theology', in John E. Murdoch and Edith D. Sylla, eds., *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning* (Dordrecht, 1975), pp. 87–103. See also Hans Küng *et al.*, *Christentum und Weltreligionen: Hinführung und Dialog mit Islam, Hinduismus und Buddhismus* (Munich, 1984), p. 129: 'Satan's revolt has no metaphysical consequences, mankind remains untouched by it. The same applies to Adam's fall which was no real fall but rather a slip which Adam himself corrected. Rectification comes about through atonement which, however, is required only for particular transgressions. Redemption does not figure in this system.'
14 The event is related in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* and *Sūrat al-Baqara*.
15 Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Studien zum Kulturbild und Selbstverständnis des Islams* (Zurich, 1969), p. 36; idem, 'Observations on the Muslim Concept of Evil', *Studia Islamica* 31 (1970), pp. 117–34.
16 von Grunebaum's view of Islam, which he often projects onto the Qur'an as well, however, is widely dominated by positions held in the Ashʿarī school, which became prevailing in Sunni theology. His conclusions, which will be discussed at the end of this article, are therefore to be taken with caution; see Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblis*, pp. 10–11.
17 See Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 123–4. For the use of the conceptual term *khaṭī'a* in the Qur'an, see Q. 69:9 and 37; Q. 2:286; Q. 33:5, and so on; for *khaṭa'a* and *akhṭa'a*, see Q. 26:82; Q. 29:12; Q. 20:73; Q. 4:112; see *khāṭī'a* (participle) already in Q. 96:16.
18 This term had already been extant in pre-Islamic ancient Arabian poetry. See Isabel Toral-Niehoff, 'Eine arabische poetische Gestaltung des Sündenfalls: Das vorislamische Schöpfungsgedicht von Adī ibn Zayd', in Hartwig *et al.*, *'Im vollen Licht der Geschichte'*, pp. 235–56; Kirill Dmitriev, 'An Early Christian Arabic Account of the Creation of the World', in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, pp. 349–88.
19 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 451–72.
20 Ibid., pp. 230–34.
21 See chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
22 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 489–91.
23 See chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
24 For a commentary on the sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 642–85.
25 For more on the Prophet's calling, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 657–8; for his night journey, see ibid., pp. 469–71 and chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'; for the Moses–Muhammad typology, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 669–71.
26 See chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
27 Hirschfeld (*Beiträge*, p. 22) speaks of 'Qur'anic reproductions of the Decalogue', yet he counts not ten, but nine commandments. He erroneously assumes this is the number

intended so that the Qur'anic catalogue would match the 'nine signs' given to Moses according to Q. 17:101 and Q. 27:12.
28 Speyer (*Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 305–10) discusses the following verses: Q. 23:1–11; Q. 25:64–74; Q. 17:24–39 and 46; Q. 2:38–45, 77, 172.
29 Hirschfeld, *Beiträge*, pp. 22–3.
30 Ibid., p. 25.
31 Ibid., p. 26.
32 This has been the fate of much of the scholarship of the Wissenschaft des Judentums which, although extremely insightful, has simply been ignored – even in modern scholarship in Germany. For more on the Wissenschaft des Judentums, see Hartwig *et al.*, *'Im vollen Licht der Geschichte'* and also chapter 1, *'Neither of the East nor of the West'*.
33 William M. Brinner, 'An Islamic Decalogue', in William M. Brinner and S.D. Ricks, eds., *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions* (Atlanta, GA, 1986), pp. 67–84. The author quotes a short and somewhat condescending reference to the Qur'anic Decalogue from Morris S. Seale, *Qur'an and Bible* (London, 1978), p. 74.
34 Stefan Schreiner, 'Der Dekalog der Bibel und der Pflichtkodex für den Muslim', *Judaica* 43 (1987), pp. 171–84.
35 Hans Zirker, *Der Koran: Zugänge und Lesarten* (Darmstadt, 1999).
36 Karl Prenner, 'Du sollst in Freiheit leben – der Dekalog'. Unpublished paper presented at the 11th Austrian Christian-Jewish Bible Week (Österreichische Christlich-jüdische Bibelwoche), 15–20 July 2002, Graz.
37 Sebastian Günther, *'O People of the Scripture! Come to a Word Common to You and Us* (Q. 3:64): The Ten Commandments and the Qur'an', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9 (2007), pp. 28–58.
38 Paret, *Kommentar*.
39 Zirker, *Der Koran*, p. 154. He alerts us to the absence of the second, third and fourth commandments (ban of images, ban of the misuse of God's name, respecting the Sabbath) from the second Qur'anic Decalogue and accentuates the incorporation of local practices (infanticide, law of retaliation etc.) in it. Since this later text in *Sūrat al-Anʿām* (Q. 6) is a recapitulation of the earlier, middle Meccan Decalogue, with which the community was no doubt sufficiently familiar, Zirker overlooks the original dynamic tension extant in the earliest version of the Qur'anic Decalogue.
40 Schreiner, 'Der Dekalog', p. 171: 'Muhammad den Biblischen Dekalog, den er sehr wohl vor Augen hatte, als er seinen Pflichtenkodex für den Muslim zusammenzustellen im Begriff war.'
41 Other formulas for conferring authority are: [*O believers*] *prescribed for you is . . .* (*kutiba ʿalaykum . . .*, Q. 2:183); *So God ordains* (*farīḍatan mina'llāhi*, Q. 9:60).
42 See Exodus 22:20–26. For the injunction to neither be avaricious nor give too much, Speyer (*Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, p. 307) quotes a Biblical reference (Deuteronomy 15:7–9) and a Mishnaic parallel (Ket. 67b, 'you are committed to feed him but not to make him rich'). It is obvious that this way of disposing of one's property is different from that recommended by Jesus in Matthew 19:16–22.
43 Speyer (ibid., p. 307) refers to a homily by the Syriac poet Aphraates (d. 345/956); Brinner ('An Islamic Decalogue', p. 80) adduces Micah 6:8.
44 See the commentary on the sura in Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 291–309.
45 This reference had already been noted by Hirschfeld, *Beiträge*, pp. 25–6.
46 The proscription/limitation of sexual freedom is readily found in earlier catalogues of virtues. Importantly, however, the new Qur'anic prohibition of sexual promiscuity is, for the first time, marked by the Hebrew loan word *zinā*; see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, p. 297. For more on the later Qur'anic positions concerning the issue of sexuality, see Harald Motzki, 'Wal-muḥṣanātu mina n-nisāʿi illā mā malakat aimānukum (Koran 4:24) und die koranische Sexualethik', *Der Islam* 63 (1986), pp. 192–218.

47 Stroumsa, *Das Ende des Opferkults*, pp. 21–52.

48 It is noteworthy that the Decalogue makes no exceptions for unbelieving parents and relatives, although the middle Meccan suras are replete with references to such cases of conflict. The exclusively positivist injunction may be due to the status of the Decalogue as possessing universal validity.

49 Stroumsa, *Das Ende des Opferkults*, pp. 120–51.

50 For more on the female reproacher as a stock character in pre-Islamic poetry, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 697–8.

51 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 378–94 (for Q. 80:33–7) and pp. 431–51 (for Q. 70:8–14).

52 See chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.

53 In post-Muhammadan Islamic tradition, this place was identified with a heavenly place, at the summit of the mountain, where God spoke to his chosen prophets. Tradition also recounts diverse encounters between Muhammad and Moses in the heavenly realm. The analogy between the two experiences is thus aptly unfolded.

54 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp. 67–9.

55 The text is difficult to date, but Nöldeke considers it Meccan; see Nöldeke, *Geschiche des Qorans*, p. 162: 'V. 142 (=153) und V. 153–154 (=154–155) werden mit Unrecht für medinisch gehalten. [Verse 142 (=153) and verses 153–154 (=154–155) are wrongly regarded as Medinan.].' In view of the analogous catalogue structure of both Q. 6:51–3 and Exodus 20: 1–17, this version seems to reflect some familiarity with the Hebrew Bible text which would fit with the Medinese community's interactions with the local Jews.

56 The expression 'the scripture complete' (*al-kitāb tamāman*) echoes the expression *torat YHWH temīma* (Psalms 19:8–9), a verse used in Jewish liturgy; see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, p. 297. The phrase 'complete for him who does/did good' (*'alā'lladhī aḥsana*) seems to refer to Moses in particular; therefore, a translation of the past tense is preferable to the present.

57 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 552–4.

58 See Paret, *Kommentar*, p. 23. Hirschfeld (*Beiträge*, pp. 26–7) assumes that the social context in which this text emerged (its *Sitz im Leben*) was an inter-tribal conflict at Medina, involving both Arabs and Jews, which led to the expulsion of the vanquished Jewish group from their settlements and the subsequent redemption of prisoners.

59 See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, NJ, 1992).

60 von Grunebaum, *Islam*, p. 9.

61 One might adduce as a particularly ambiguous moral example, the acts committed by the anonymous figure in the (non-Biblical) Moses narrative in Q. 18:65–82. Moreover, the Qur'anic references to the diverse potencies of the soul point to far more internalisation of individual thoughts and actions than von Grunebaum admits.

62 Bodman (*The Poetics of Iblis*, p. 11) in this extract refers to von Grunebaum's work 'Observations on the Muslim Concept of Evil'.

63 See Luke 18:18–23 where Jesus judges a certain rich young man's adherence to the commandments insufficient to achieve eternal life, and counsels that he would also need to give all his riches to the poor.

SECTION III

Narrative Figures between the Bible and the Qur'an

10

Narrative as Canonical Process: The Story of Moses Seen through the Evolving History of the Qur'an*

Introduction

THE CONTROVERSY between traditionalist and revisionist scholars is centred around the question of how the Qur'an emerged: was it from a premeditated compilation or from a process of communication?[1] This chapter attempts to verify the thesis that the Qur'an is the document of a proclamation in progress. Since indications of development should be most evident and most easily traceable in a literary genre that often recurs in the Qur'an, that revolves around one particular plot and highlights one central figure, it is the genre of Qur'anic storytelling that promises to provide the most relevant proof. Is the retelling of stories mere repetitiousness resulting from a lack of imagination or is it an intended textual strategy? If the latter, is it due to a homiletic intent on the part of the compiler of the Qur'an? Or, if the former, is repetition employed as a vehicle for transporting a sequence of changing discourses and changing orientations successively developed by the proclaimer and his community, and clad in the guise of a particular plot? Scholars generally tend to opt for the former hypothesis. Their stance implicitly precludes the historicity of the Qur'an's origin as an interactive process of communication, since it fails to notice the listeners' response to the proclamation which only a close reading of the narrative intent of each single story can reveal. In the following, we will pursue the less well travelled path, taking the complex structure of the Moses narratives as a vantage point from which to survey

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Erzählen als kanonischer Prozess: Die Mose-Erzählung im Wandel der koranischen Geschichte', in Rainer Brunner, Monika Gronke, Jens P. Laut and Ulrich Rebstock, eds., *Islamstudien ohne Ende* (Würzburg, Harrassowitz, 2002), pp. 322–44. Reprinted by kind permission of the publisher. Translation of the original provided by Gwendolin Goldbloom.

traces of an ongoing interaction between the proclaimer and his audience, one which attests a development of their religious identity.[2]

The Qur'an: An Ahistorical Text?

> The purpose of stories in the Qur'ān . . . is profoundly different from their purpose in the Old Testament; the latter uses stories to explain particular chapters in Israel's history, the former to illustrate – again and again – how the true Believer acts in certain situations. In line with this purpose, Qur'ānic characters are portrayed as moral paradigms, emblematic of all who are good or evil. Moreover, as stories, they are not imbued with much, if any, development – which is why they can appear as detached fragments. In this sense, the Qur'ān can be seen to be profoundly ahistorical; it is simply not concerned with history in the sense of development and change, either of the prophets of peoples before Muḥammad, or of Muḥammad himself, because in the Qur'ānic view the identity of the community to which Muḥammad was sent is not *historically* determined, but *morally* determined.[3]

Thus from an Islamic point of view, revelations are gifts from God, which, in the past, were numerous and occurred in a largely homogeneous form. They were meant to remedy damage done by the previous community, and enable [the contemporary community] to live according to God's guidance once again. Accordingly, they are always individual measures which, while they have their historical consequences, cannot be integrated into one all-embracing history of revelation with a definite purpose.[4]

The verdict that the Qur'an is uninterested in history – proffered in the above quotations by Fred Donner and Hans Zirker, respectively – is a topos of Western scholarship which seems to result naturally from a comparison between the Qur'an and the two older monotheistic scriptures. It is true that the Qur'an does not structure its salvation-history drama into a narrative in the way the Hebrew Bible does, neither does it narrate a purposeful history of revelation and redemption in the way the New Testament does. Unlike the two previous scriptures, the Qur'anic text as we know it (the *muṣḥaf*) does not even begin with the story of creation; rather, it starts with an introductory prayer, the *Fātiḥa*, followed by a polythematic message to the historical recipients of the emerging scripture consisting of narratives, legislation and polemic (*Sūrat al-Baqara*). Even though the corpus concludes with a comparatively homogeneous sequence of short suras (from *Sūrat al-Naba'* to *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*) which are sealed by two apotropaic formulas (*Sūrat al-Falaq* and *Sūrat al-Nās*), it is hard to ignore that the majority of the suras are

heterogeneous, displaying complex compositions, comprising multiple topics going back to different times of origin. They seem to have been arranged purely by the criterion of decreasing length, unbounded by either chronological or theological principles. The narratives, also, do not follow any linear chronology; on the contrary, most stories are repeated in different versions and reappear dispersed over diverse contexts. Some of the narratives which took shape early on in the development of the Qur'anic corpus follow a noticeably unified pattern: a messenger dispatched by God preaches to his people about God's unity and about eschatological accountability, but is rejected, and though he himself is saved he must witness disaster befalling his people. The verdict of a cyclical conception of history has been attached to the Qur'an with regard to this particular type of narrative.[5]

Do all these characteristics, however, make the Qur'an ahistorical, as some scholars suggest? Does the Qur'an really portray the earlier revelations as having occurred in large numbers and in a similar form? Should the messengers of the Qur'anic narratives, without exception, be thought of as moral paradigms, ideal types who did not undergo any development to attain their perfection, and who are of interest only as symbols of the Quran's ethical message? Does even the image of Muhammad himself remain without development? These impressions, which seem to be widespread in present-day research, arise once the Qur'an is read in its post-redaction form, as a unified document made up of pieces of evidence of equal chronological and hierarchical value, and regardless of the processes of change reflected within the Qur'an's language, style and referentiality. Seen from that perspective, narratives featuring the same characters and the same events must appear to be simply repetitions bearing no historical relevance.

It must be admitted that this kind of holistic view is not an odd or isolated approach to the Qur'an, but can claim to follow a most esteemed model. It is, in fact, the perspective held by members of the more traditional circles within the Islamic community itself, who even regard the immutable image of the Prophet and, indeed, the ideal nature of the prophetic type as a binding dogma. According to this view, the Qur'an appears as the document of a vertical communication between God and man that transcends the confines of time, an image that is not substantially disturbed by the fact that the community occasionally did take an interest in the historical circumstances that might have conditioned the revelation of individual texts, an interest which is attested in the genre of the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the literature on the occasions of revelation. It is precisely because the Qur'an, which repeatedly refers to itself as God's eternal word, was cherished by the Companions as a perfect and complete revelation, that the redaction committee was anxious to

arrange the available texts into a corpus according to wholly mechanical criteria, such as the length of the suras.[6] Furthermore, there seemed to be no need for the early community to provide an orientation for actual readings by way of arranging the text in a certain order, since the pericopes needed for ritual use were already available in the shape of the earlier suras,[7] large parts of which the community either knew by heart, or were in the shape of verse groups – regarded fit for special occasions – that could be culled from longer texts without scruple.[8] Nor was there a demand for a historical re-narration of the origins of the new religion, since the Qur'an – in contrast to the scriptures of the two older monotheistic religions which had attained the status of sacred texts long after they were first fixed in writing – had been only recently communicated, and the foundational events had only just taken place. The context of reality in the case of the Qur'an was still alive when the textual corpus was compiled and canonised.[9] It was not until the later generations, who did not share this historical memory any more, that this lack of chronology within the corpus might have seemed a deficit; this, however, did not occur – the lack of historical memory in the Qur'an rather turned out as a stimulus to collect details about the Prophet's biography, the *sīra*.

During its oral proclamation, the Qur'anic text was transmitted as individual suras which the community perceived as documents reflecting the individual stages of salvation history of which they themselves were a part. After the death of the Prophet, this perception changed when the suras were placed together and codified as the authoritative Qur'an. The Qur'an then came to be viewed as a homogeneous text whose message transcended the sociopolitical concerns of a particular time or place, a speech conveyed through a succession of typologically related prophets. This latter perception of the Qur'an, however, should not be considered as a given, since it arose as a result of a historical development due to the rapid growth of the faith community beyond the circle of those directly involved in the process of transmission. At this point, the texts were re-evaluated – they were no longer perceived as divine messages transmitted by the Prophet in a particular historical time, but as manifestations of the word of the transcendent God among humankind.[10] This post-redaction perspective of the Muslim community, which is cherished by scholars who tend to distance themselves from historical-critical research, may indeed be promising for the discussion of the Qur'an in interreligious contexts; however, it is only one possible perception of the text, which hides under its surface another completely different image of the Qur'an.

It would be hasty to conclude that the lack of external order in the Qur'anic text must necessarily imply an absence of internal order. The Qur'an is not

only the collection of documents, later canonised by the community to bear witness to their unique collective faith experience, but also, in its stylistic intention, a literary work. It is, to be precise, a collection of individual literary texts (suras) that build upon each other; as such, it demands to be analysed, to be studied with the focus on the medium itself. Kermani is the most recent scholar to have taken up arms in defence of the Qur'an's distinctly poetic nature:

> Just like other texts, the Qur'an prepares its audience using 'announcements, open and hidden signals, well-known signs or implicit indicators for a very particular kind of reception' . . . In addition, the Qur'an is self-referential to a high degree, it is a text that reflects itself in many passages, it comments on itself and takes its own linguistic form up as a topic of debate, more than any other scripture throughout the history of world religions.[11]

Once we concede this self-referentiality, we must also concede a historical development: only a text that grows around a nucleus is able to comment on itself. This particular dynamic of textual growth is at the heart of the canonical process underlying the Qur'an.[12] In the following, we will look at the narratives of Moses in the Qur'an in order to show how the Qur'an may be profitably read with the canonical process in mind.[13] For it was not only the message that was conveyed, but the form and the order in which it was conveyed that led the Qur'an to be accepted as a scripture, even while its genesis was still ongoing.

Narrative as the Mirror of Changing Perspectives: The Moses Narratives in the Qur'an

Moses is the Israelite prophet par excellence:[14] in a uniquely intimate meeting, God spoke to him, he received the Torah and, with the exodus of his people from Egypt to the Promised Land, he guided the fate of the Israelites as no one had done before him. Consequently, it is not surprising that of all the Biblical characters in the Qur'an, he is referred to most frequently, over a hundred times.[15] Not always are complete narratives wrought around him; more frequently, particularly during the later periods, he appears in the picture together with his scripture (*kitāb Mūsā*) – the highest person of authority to confirm the truth of the Qur'an (see e.g. Q. 11:17, Q. 46:12). He is, however, the protagonist of seven narratives, several of them developed in great detail, in which his character assumes traits so distinctive, and his actions are portrayed in a manner so autonomous and dramatic that he may well be called a Qur'anic hero, being on a par with only a few others, such as Joseph and perhaps also Abraham.[16] Furthermore, he is confronted from the very beginning with a

highly symbolic opponent in the person of Pharaoh, whose mythopoeic character persists into modern times, not least because of his link to Moses. Consequently, the Moses narratives offer a promising base for a study of an awareness of history in the Qur'an.

In this chapter, the Moses narratives (Q. 79:15–26, Q. 37:114–22, Q. 20:10–99, Q. 26:10–67, Q. 40:23–55, Q. 28:1–46, Q. 10:75–93) will first be examined within the context of their respective suras and their contents summarised briefly ('The narrative within the sura'), then they will be assigned to a particular stage in the canonical process on the basis of intertextual references within the text ('*Sitz im Leben* and progress in the canonical process').[17] Considering the diversity of the narratives, it appeared prudent to classify the individual recurrent topics – arranged roughly in the order in which they occur in the text of the Qur'an – so as to facilitate an overview of the whole spectrum and the changing focus of the narratives. The individual topics are as follows:

Classification		The Qur'anic reference
I. The call (Exodus 3:1–14) (Exodus 3:18–22) (Exodus 4:3–7) (Exodus 4:10–16)	a) God revealing Himself to Moses	Q. 79:16; Q. 37:114; Q. 20:10–16; Q. 28:29–30
	b) God initiating Moses' performance of miraculous signs	Q. 20:21–3; Q. 28:31–2; Q. 10:75
	c) God sending Moses (with Aaron) as His messenger.	Q. 79:17–19; Q. 20:24–36; Q. 26:10–15; Q. 28:34–5; Q. 40:23–4
II. Confronting Pharaoh (Exodus 7:8–13) (Exodus 12)	a) Moses' verbal attempt to bring about conversion	Q. 79:18–24; Q. 20:47–55; Q. 26:16–29; Q. 10:76–8
	b) Moses' performance of the miraculous signs	Q. 79:20; Q. 20:56–7; Q. 26:31–3; Q. 28:36
	c) Moses' contest with sorcerers	Q. 20:58–69; Q. 26:34–45; Q. 10:79–81
	d) Moses convincing the sorcerers/others	Q. 20:70–76; Q. 10:85–6
	e) God preparing Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt	Q. 37:115–16; Q. 20:77; Q. 10:87
III. Exodus (Exodus 14:1–25) (Exodus 14:26–31)	a) Crossing the sea on dry path b) Destruction of Pharaoh c) Pharaoh's repentance	Q. 37:115–16; Q. 20:77–9; Q. 26:63–7; Q. 10:90–91; Q. 28:40
IV. Moses' past before he became a prophet (Exodus 2:1–10) (Exodus 2:11–15) (Exodus 2:16–22)	a) Moses saved from the persecution of the infants b) Moses saved from prosecution after shedding blood c) Moses' stay in Midian	Q. 20:37–40; Q. 20:40–41; Q. 28:7–28

V. Insolence of the Israelites (Exodus 32:15–27)	a) The Israelites' adoration of the golden calf b) Their being held to account	Q. 20:83–98
VI. Receiving the scripture (Exodus 20) (Exodus 34:1–7)		Q. 37:117; Q. 40:53; Q. 28:43

The First Meccan Period

Adopting Nöldeke's relative chronology as a heuristic basis allows us to recognise, in the suras he classified as belonging to the early Meccan period,[18] a common discourse centring around the act of proclamation as well as the problem of the acceptance of orally communicated eschatological messages. In the early suras, the interaction between the speaker and the community seems to have taken place in the public spaces in Mecca, where the traditional pagan practices competed with the newly emerging monotheistic service.[19] Consequently, what is emblematic for this dispute are the references to sacred times and holy places relevant to the cult,[20] which appear in the introductory sections of a large number of early Meccan suras. Narratives are scarce; in this early period, there is only one Moses narrative.[21]

Moses narrative in *Sūrat al-Nāziʿāt* (Q. 79:15–26)

The narrative within the sura

The first Moses narrative in the Qur'an (Q. 79:15–26) is also the very first Qur'anic narrative as such.[22] It occupies the middle part of *Sūrat al-Nāziʿāt* and is marked by a rhyme of its own. The sura is introduced by an oath cluster evoking a raid, which, as in *Sūrat al-ʿĀdiyāt*, illustrates the suddenness of eschatological awakening.[23] The sura ends with a praise of the creator, followed by an eschatological scene depicting the saved and the damned, which is once more used to emphasise the suddenness of the awakening. The events in the narrative and their classification are:

(Ia) Moses' call to prophethood (Q. 79:16, see Exodus 3:1–14);
(Ic) his subsequent mission (Q. 79:17–19, see Exodus 3:18–22);
(IIa, b) his confronting Pharaoh (Q. 79:18–24, see Exodus 7:8–13);
(IIIb) the punishment of the insolent Pharaoh (Q. 79:25–6, see Exodus 14:26–31).

The introductory formula in Q. 79:1 appeals to the listeners' previous knowledge of the story. The first verse of the narrative, Q. 79:16 (*When his Lord*

called to him in the holy valley – Towa, Idh nādāhu rabbuhu bi'l-wādi'l-muqaddasi Ṭuwā) refers to the particular form of God's audible address (*nādā*) to Moses, which occurs in a holy place beyond ordinary space.[24] The emphasis of the narrative in *Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt*, however, is less on the messenger's experience (Ia) than on the process of communicating the message (II). Although the messenger produces a great sign (IIb, Q. 79:20: *So he showed him the great sign – fa-arāhu'l-āyata'l-kubrā*), Pharaoh rejects the message, calls his followers and, in a daring pronunciation of blasphemy, declares himself the highest lord (Q. 79:24: *'I am your Lord, the Most High!' – anā rabbukumu'l-a'lā*). Worldly and eschatological retribution follow suit. The aim of this narrative is to provide *'a lesson for him who fears [God]'* (*'ibratan li-man yakhshā*, Q. 79:26).

Sitz im Leben *and progress in the canonical process*

This narrative about Moses' failure to persuade Pharaoh is obviously connected to the debate about the authority of the messenger; the briefly later sura, *Sūrat al-Najm* (Q. 53), attests to this, based on its strikingly similar depiction of the Prophet Muhammad to Moses. In *Sūrat al-Najm*, which culminates in the open challenge of the pagan cult of the three deities Manāt, Allāt and al-'Uzza, it is claimed that the Prophet, not unlike Moses, was himself granted a view of the 'greatest sign' during one of his visions: *Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord* (*la-qad ra'ā min āyāti rabbihi'l-kubrā*, Q. 53:18; compare with Exodus 3:3).[25] Calling this sign to witness, however, has no effect on the unbelievers. In the earlier *Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt*, it is the unbelieving Pharaoh who is shown the sign as proof of the supernatural origin of the message; its failure to convince him prefigures that of the Prophet to convince with the help of *āyāt*. It is noteworthy that Moses' only function is to call for Pharaoh's conversion and to present the sign, not to liberate the Israelites. The second part of the narrative (Q. 79:21–6) runs its course without Moses' intervention; here, it is Pharaoh and God who are the protagonists. Similarly, in the earlier suras the divine speaker often confronts the unbelievers himself, telling His messenger to 'leave' them to Him.[26] The intended lesson for the believers corresponds to that of the retribution stories:[27] throughout history, as well as in the present, hubris appears to have had the upper hand over piety, as had rejection over acceptance of the uncomfortable message, although there is the threat of retribution in this world and eschatological accountability in the next.

Yet, the narrative is not simply one of the stereotypical depictions of the fate of earlier messengers: God's calling to Moses at a special place and making that calling audible to him, indicates that the protagonist of this story is an

extraordinary figure – not dissimilar to the proclaimer. Moses' proximity to the person of Muhammad will subsequently be unfolded, but at this early Meccan stage it already becomes clear from the vocabulary used by Moses in his preaching as his words recall those related to Muhammad: Moses' choice of the word purify (*tazakkā*) in Q. 79:18 parallels that used by Muhammad in Q. 80:3, 7, Q. 87:14 and Q. 92:18; and Moses' choice of the words *I should guide thee* (*ahdiyaka*) in Q. 79:19 parallels the vocabulary relating to Muhammad in Q. 93:7. So, too, does the rejection of Moses' preaching by Pharaoh, *he cried lies* (*kadhdhaba*) in Q. 79:21 and *he turned away* (*adbara*) in Q. 79:22, evoke the frequent descriptions of a displeased Meccan audience facing Muhammad in Q. 75:32, Q. 92:9, 16, Q. 96:13, Q. 82:9, Q. 83:11–12, 17, Q. 107:1, Q. 84:22 (for *kadhdhaba*), and Q. 70:17, Q. 74:23 (for *adbara*). Also, Pharaoh's rallying of his followers in Q. 79:23: *he mustered* (*fa-nādā*) recalls the scene in Q. 96:17: *So let him call on his concourse!* (*fa'l-yad'u nādiyahu*). However, the parallels between Moses and Muhammad are ultimately most apparent from their shared privilege of having been shown divine signs. In Q. 79:20, *the greatest sign* (*al-āyatu'l-kubrā*) refers to the sign given to Moses during his aural experience in Exodus 3:3; it will be recalled to evoke Muhammad's vision in Q. 53:18.

The Second Meccan Period

During the middle Meccan period, new reference points crop up. In particular, it is the debate about the relationship between the new Qur'anic message and the earlier ones that had already attained the status of scripture, that assumes increasing importance in that period. Concomitantly, a new type of scenery evolves which fundamentally resets the spatial determinants: the real space is superseded by the imaginary space of Biblical topography and the spiritual space created by ritual performance. Suras frequently recall the tripartite structure of the services familiar from the monotheistic environment, made up of introductory and concluding *responsoria* with the recitation of a Bible passage at their centre. Similarly, most suras of the middle Meccan period display a tripartite structure, consisting of a dialogical or at least discursive (polemic–apologetic) introduction, a narrative from Biblical or post-Biblical tradition in the middle, followed by a discursive conclusion.[28] The references to scripture and to scriptural paraphernalia at the beginning of many of these suras are emblematic of the now pervading view that the message conveyed by Muhammad itself was a continuation of the earlier revealed scriptures of the Jews and the Christians.[29] Besides one summarising list in Q. 37:114–22, there are three detailed Moses narratives during the

second Meccan period: Q. 20:9–99, Q. 26:10–67 and Q. 18:60–82.[30] (The narrative in Q. 18:60–82 will not be discussed here since it reflects non-Biblical stories.)

Moses narrative in *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* (Q. 37:114–22)

The narrative within the sura

Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt begins with an oath cluster conjuring the angels, who are represented as standing or stepping forward in solemn procession, praising God and eventually enunciating the scaring shout to usher in the awakening of the dead on Judgement Day.[31] The focus of the sura is on the discussion of the several types of negatively connoted spirit beings: false gods (*āliha*, Q. 37:36, 86, 91–95; *Baʿl*, Q. 37:125), demons (*shayṭān*, Q. 37:7–10) and 'daughters' of God (Q. 37:149–53). Their purely imagined reality and their lack of real power are contrasted with the truth of the eschatological retribution (Q. 37:176–7), where the angels actively participate as positive spiritual agents (Q. 37:3, 165–6), and with the fact of the emergence of a cultic community following the ritual practice of the angels (Q. 37:143, 166) who are described as *those that glorify* [*God*] (*musabbiḥūn*). A remarkable characteristic of this sura is a three-verse refrain which culminates in a eulogy praising the messengers (Noah: Q. 37:79–81; Abraham: Q. 37:109–111; Moses and Aaron: Q. 37:120–22; and Elias: Q. 37:130–32).

The account of Moses and Aaron (Q. 37:114–22) is brief, indicating that the listeners already had a sound knowledge of the events. It classifies the history of Moses' and Aaron's call (I, Q. 37:114; compare with Exodus 3:1–14) among a number of other signs of divine mercy, beginning with the salvation of the two prophets and their people through divine intervention (IIIa, Q. 37:115), via the defeat of their enemies (IIIb, Q. 37:116) – obviously an allusion to the Israelites' crossing of the parted Red Sea (Exodus 14:1–25) – and their being presented with the gift of scripture (VI, Q. 37:117; compare with Exodus 20 and Exodus 34:1–7). Within the sura, the short passage concerning Moses and Aaron falls at the centre of a list of prophetic legends arranged in historical order, that is, beginning with the story of Noah, followed by a detailed story of Abraham's destruction of idols and ending with three accounts about Elias (Q. 37:123–32), Lot (Q. 37:133–8) and Jonah (Q. 37:139–48). Moses and Aaron occupy a special position since their distinctive divine gifts eclipse those of all the others and their final deliverance uniquely includes that of their people. After the series of narratives, a concluding passage picks up on the debate that had been triggered by the 'satanic verses' (Q. 53:19–23), surrounding the so-called daughters of

God and the alleged kinship between God and demons (*jinna*, Q. 37:149–59). It attests the gulf between the believers, who have now been confirmed as a community of servants of God (Q. 37:40, 122, 128, 160, 169), and the unbelievers.

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The sura as a whole affirms the existence of a faith community, whose members worship God (Q. 37:143) in imitation of the heavenly hosts (who are mentioned in Q. 37:1–2). The angels seem to prefigure the attitude of the worshippers in their service; their liturgical mimesis of the angels is taken for granted in other cultic contexts of late antique piety – it is made explicit in Christian liturgy for example.[32] The projection of a liturgical ceremony prefigured in heaven is once more made discernible through a message that is conveyed only obliquely through intertextual references. In several instances, the sura quotes fragments of the communal prayer, the *Fātiḥa*, which is not surprising in a text that begins with a reference to the heavenly performers of the ritual, 'those who are arranged in rows' (*al-ṣāffāt*). *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt* ends with the reference to the second verse of the *Fātiḥa: Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being* (*al-ḥamdu li'llāhi rabbi'l-ʿālamīn*), which may be meant in the ritual sense, that is, as a call to recite the *Fātiḥa*.[33] Similarly, it evokes a verse from the *Fātiḥa* (Q. 1:6) in the narrative on Moses and Aaron (*and guided them in the straight path – wa hadaynāhumā'l-ṣirāṭa'l-mustaqīm*, Q. 37:118) and refers twice to those who erred/went astray (*ḍalla*, Q. 37:69, 71; see *ḍāllīn*, Q. 1:7), the only protection against this being God's blessing (*niʿma*, Q. 37:57; see *alladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim*, Q. 1:7). Finally, God is addressed as the Lord of all Being (*rabb al-ʿālamīn*, Q. 37:87, 182; see Q. 1:2).[34]

The series of verses presenting the seven prophets – all of them Biblical figures – exemplifies God's grace towards the faithful, affirming their exemplary nature as servants of God, as they receive the same eulogy (*Peace be upon . . ., salāmun ʿalā . . .*, Q. 37:79, 109, 120, 130) except the last two (Q. 37:133, 139). Though the transmission of the scripture through Moses and Aaron, which is unique within this narrative cycle, is only mentioned in passing, it is of particular importance: it will become the main sign of prophethood, which will soon after be bestowed on Muhammad too. Prophets, here, for the first time, are being 'canonised' with an honorific title. Thus, the reference to them is encoded ritually, even outside the recitation of scripture. It is obvious that another, sacred world emerges from the Biblical horizons, a world counter to the oppressive reality of the nascent Qur'anic community which can be conjured in the liturgy.

Moses narrative in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* (Q. 20:9–99)

The narrative within the sura

This sura, which contains the most elaborate story of Moses, begins with a short hymnic introduction (Q. 20:1–7) that refers to God enthroned (Q. 20:5) in the heavens and thus recalls the Prophet's vision in *Sūrat al-Najm* (see Q. 53:6–7). The conclusion (Q. 20:100–35) contains a polemic, an affirmation of the revelation, the story of how the first humans were led astray,[35] and, finally, a warning to the unbelievers. The Moses narrative occupies all of the middle part of the sura (Q. 20:9–99), and is composed of five distinct scenes.

In the first scene, the calling (Ia see also Exodus 3:1–4, 18) is fully unfolded (Q. 20:10–16): God himself informs Moses of the holiness of the place of his calling, *the holy valley, Towa* (*wādi'l-muqaddas Ṭuwā*, Q. 20:12) and announces a revelation that will be addressed to him verbally (Q. 20:13). In Q. 20:14, He presents Himself as the One (*Verily I am God; there is no god but I – innanī anā'llāhu lā ilāha illā anā*) and instructs Moses to worship Him (*therefore serve Me, fa-ʿbudnī*; compare Q. 1:5 *iyyāka naʿbudu*) and to pray (*perform the prayer, wa aqimi'l-ṣalāt*). The reference to God's knowledge of 'the Hour' (*al-sāʿa*, Q. 20:15) links the Biblical event to the situation of the Meccan audience, who are constantly warned of the imminent Hour.

The second scene describes Moses' instruction in the performance of miraculous signs (Ib, Q. 20:17–23). As a demonstration of *the greatest signs* (*al-āyātinā'l-kubrā*, Q. 20:23; compare Q. 79:20) to be shown to Pharaoh, Moses' staff is momentarily turned into a live snake. As a further sign, Moses' arm is made to be diseased and healed immediately.[36] Moses must go to Pharaoh, strengthened by this authorisation (Q. 20:23–4; compare with Q. 79:17). Feeling too weak to carry out the order alone, Moses asks for his brother Aaron to be sent with him. His prayer is heard. This prayer allows Moses to voice his emotional plight himself, whereas in the Biblical account, this is narrated about him, in the third person (see Exodus 4:10–11). God also reminds Moses of the two times he had already been saved miraculously: from the Egyptians' persecution of the infants (IVa, Q. 20:37–40, Exodus 2:1–10) and, later, when Moses sought refuge from his pursuers in Midian (IVb, Q. 20:40, see Exodus 2:11–15).

The order for Moses to confront Pharaoh (Ic) and Moses' actual confrontation of him (IIa), also topics in *Sūrat al-Nāziʿāt*, is extended in the third scene. Moses must get Pharaoh to fear God (Q. 20:44), a reminiscence of the early retribution stories, and convince him to let the people of Israel go (Q. 20:47) – this goal of Moses' mission is made explicit for the first time

in this sura. Moses' and Aaron's fears are dispelled, and they receive a short sermon to send them on their way (Q. 20:47). Pharaoh, however, after a lengthy dispute kindled by the question about the identity of the messengers' God (Q. 20:49–52, see Exodus 5:2) rejects the message, remaining obstinate, even after Moses' sermon on the power of God as creator and preserver (IIa, Q. 20:53–5). Pharaoh accuses the messengers of sorcery and orders them to take part in a contest (IIb, Q. 20:57) which ends successfully for Moses: the Egyptian sorcerers are converted and prostrate themselves in adoration of the messengers' Lord. Pharaoh threatens them with the cruellest of punishments, yet they fearlessly profess their faith in the style of a Qur'anic sermon, thus taking over from Moses in his guise as preacher.

Moses reappears for his next task, the liberation of the Israelites, in the fourth scene. The depiction of the exodus of the Israelites is limited to them safely crossing the sea on a dry path (IIIa, Q. 20:77, see Exodus 14:21–9) while Pharaoh and his followers drown (IIIb, Q. 20:78, see Exodus 14:26–30). The ensuing short direct address allegedly to the Israelites (Q. 20:80–82) summarises the central events of the Israelite's history, which had until then not been narrated: the crossing of the Red Sea, the annihilation of Pharaoh and the Israelites' miraculous provision with nourishment. This section, however, does not really belong to the narrative about the Biblical people. It is – as the lexical evidence and its particular intertextuality suggest – a much later addition to the text, addressed to the contemporary Jews in Medina,[37] who are reminded of how 'they' (i.e. their forebears) were saved from their enemies and preserved through divine provision. This is followed with a warning against excessiveness (Q. 20:81) and the Divine's self-profession of being both wrathful and forgiving, clearly evoking one of the central Biblical references (Exodus 34:6–7) recalled in the Jewish liturgy on the Day of Atonement. The section inserted into the Meccan narrative, thus, not only completes the narrative sequence, but transcends the Meccan horizons by sending a message to a segment of the audience not addressed before: the Medinan Jews.

The last scene reconnects to the narrative of Moses (V, Q. 20:83–98).[38] Moses is once again addressed by God in a paternal manner, this time to be told that his people have succumbed to temptation. In Moses' absence, and against Aaron's warning, they made an idol and worshipped it as a god (Va, Q. 20:87, see Exodus 34:15–27). Moses demands an explanation from Aaron, who is able to justify himself using an argument known from earlier Biblical exegesis.[39] In the Qur'an the blame is put on another man, not known from the Biblical narrative, named al-Sāmirī, who fails to offer a convincing defence of himself. A similar attempt to absolve the Israelites from guilt by blaming a

stranger for instigating idolatry already occurs in Rabbinic tradition;[40] the story of the fateful transgression in the community's exegetical milieu has thus already been substantially mitigated (Vb, Q. 20:96). The narrative concludes with the destruction of the image and the reaffirmation of God's unity (Q. 20:97–8).

This long narrative is presented as neither a retribution story nor an example, but as one of the *stories of what has gone before* (*anbā'i mā qad sabaqa*, Q. 20:99) in order to show the one God triumphing over all his opponents (*Your God is only the one God; there is no god, but He alone who in His knowledge embraces everything – innamā ilāhukumu'l-llāhu lladhī lā ilāha illā huwa wasiʿa kulla shay'in ʿilman*, Q. 20:98). It does not, however, achieve this by employing the stereotype of an ideal depiction of a messenger, but shows Moses as a flawed person who is nevertheless entrusted with a mission from God. Moses kills someone by accident (Q. 20:40), he admits to his weakness and fear of more powerful opponents (Q. 20:45, Q. 20:67) and is in need of inner strengthening as he pleads for God to *open my breast* (*ishraḥ lī ṣadrī*, Q. 20:25, see Exodus 4:10–11). Furthermore, he only gradually evolves as a character qualified to perform the mission for which he had been chosen (Q. 20:41).

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This Moses narrative fully develops the earlier version of Q. 79:15–26 and, in several instances, refers to the experience of transcendence, a topic which was frequently contemplated in the early Meccan period. God audibly speaks (*nādā*) to Moses and reveals Himself as his Lord – similarly experienced by Muhammad when he encountered God in his vision. God reveals to Moses the aura of holiness surrounding the place in which they find themselves and instructs him in the rite required in a holy place (*put off thy shoes, ikhlaʿ naʿlayka*, Q. 20:12, see Exodus 3:5); similarly, Muhammad's vision also occurred in an exalted place (*by the Lote-Tree of the Boundary, nigh which is the Garden of the Refuge – ʿinda sidrati l-muntahā, ʿindahā jannatu l-ma'wā*, Q. 53:14–15). God hails Moses as the chosen one and orders him to listen attentively as he is about to receive a revelation (*give thou ear to this revelation – fa-stamiʿ li-mā yūḥā*, Q. 20:13); similarly, Muhammad receives the divine speech during his vision (*then revealed to his servant that he revealed – fa-awḥā ilā ʿabdihi mā awḥā*, Q. 53:10). Moses' revelation expresses an affirmation of God's unity, and the instruction to serve Him and to perform the prayer (*perform the prayer of My remembrance – aqimi'l-ṣalāta li'l-dhikrā*, Q. 20:14), rather like the passage recounting Muhammad's visions that concluded with a call to observe the rite of prayer (*So bow yourselves before*

God, and serve Him! – fa-sjudū li'llāhi wa-ʿbudūh, Q. 53:62). It is, however, a privilege exclusively reserved for Moses to have received a kind of paternal instruction from God regarding his prophetic sign, the transformation of his staff. This miracle – matching Muhammad's vision, designated as the 'greatest sign' – consequently served as a convincing authorisation for him to convey the message.

Moses' deep emotional affectedness can be inferred from the form of his answer: it is a poetical reply, a petitionary prayer (Q. 20:25–33), notable for its particular rhyme and rhythm. It appears as if a prophet's spontaneous reaction to a revelation is to employ an elevated, ritualised style of speech. The short prayer, which recalls the fast rhythm of the earliest suras, at the same time provides a consolation for Muhammad, whose own experience seems to be mirrored here with Moses asking to be freed from fear and anxiety, emotions which appear to precede the acceptance of a prophetic mission (*open my breast*, Q. 20:25, is reminiscent of *Did We not expand thy breast for thee [Muhammad] – a-lam nashraḥ laka ṣadrak*, Q. 94:1). The prayer ends, in a slower rhythm and a new rhyme, with the promise to praise God in worship (*nusabbiḥaka, nadhkuraka*, Q. 20:33–4) – a verse group stylistically recalling the early Meccan liturgical practice.

Following on from this, the divine mentor explains to Moses the story of his life, seen in the mirror of continuous divine guidance that culminates in his being chosen for the prophetic mission. This divine attention is unprecedented and can be compared only to the consolation of the Prophet in *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā* and *Sūrat al-Sharḥ*.[41] He, furthermore, promises to remain close to Moses (*'Fear not,' said He. 'Surely I shall be with you, hearing and seeing' – lā takhāfā innanī maʿakumā asmaʿu wa arā*, Q. 20:46), just as He frequently promises to Muhammad in the consolations at the end of a recitation. The dispute with Pharaoh about the Lord of the messengers, reflecting Exodus 5:2, displays particular rhetorical sophistication: the question about God's identity is first answered with respect to His power of creation, then, with respect to His deeds in the past and, finally, with respect to His reign over the entire cosmos. This sample of a dispute matches the earlier demand in Q. 17:53: *And say to my servants that they say words that are kindlier* (*wa-qul li-ʿibādī yaqūlū'llatī hiya aḥsan*).

The narrative shows Moses' development, his constant striving to overcome difficulties which appear to afflict the prophetic type in general. Using intertextual references to ascribe to the two prophets experiences of transcendence that are similar in many aspects, the narrative establishes Moses, who has already accomplished his prophetic task, as an example and a role model to Muhammad.

Moses narrative in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ* (Q. 26:10–67)

The narrative within the sura

Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ is introduced by a confirmation of the revelation leading to the encouragement of the Prophet Muhammad. Its middle section (Q. 26:10–191) comprises seven prophetic stories (of Moses, Abraham, Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot and Shuʿayb). It concludes with further affirmations of the revelation (Q. 26:192–227).

The narrative begins with Moses being dispatched to the evildoers (Ic, Q. 26:10–11), in an allusion to the analogous situation of the proclaimer. The messenger's doubts and fears (Ic, Q. 26:12–13) are allayed. Aaron – at Moses' request – is instructed to accompany Moses as his fellow messenger (Q. 26:15; see Exodus 4:14). Moses addresses Pharaoh as ordered, but is reproached by him ([*you are*] *one of the ungrateful – wa anta mina'l-kāfirīn*, Q. 26:19) – Pharaoh accuses Moses of disloyalty (this episode is not recorded in the Biblical exodus story) and Moses, having been sheltered by Pharaoh's family when he was young, admits to this, but justifies his escape and absence (Q. 26:20–21). The following verses take the form of a dialogue, now revolving around theological issues. At first Pharaoh is the inquiring opponent (Q. 26:23), then he becomes deriding (Q. 26:25), then reviling (Q. 26:27) and finally threatening (Q. 26:29), while Moses responds each time with an invocation of God. This exchange between Pharaoh and Moses ends with the former ordering Moses to show him the miraculous sign (IIb, Q. 26:31, see Exodus 7:9). Moses' staff turns into a serpent. This remarkable feat is interpreted by Pharaoh as a threat that must be overcome in a contest of sorcery (IIc, Q. 26:34–9). Despite being in thrall of Pharaoh's might (*ʿizza*, Q. 26:44), the sorcerers are overcome by Moses' sign, and fearlessly become believers in Moses' God – a noticeable deviation from the Biblical plot. After this, the story of the exodus is narrated, displaying yet another example of Pharaoh's and his followers' hubris, which they end up paying for with the loss of their privileged positions and their possessions. The Israelites' passage through the sea (IIIa, Q. 26:63–5) occurs through yet another of Moses' miracles when he parts the waves with his staff (Q. 26:63, see Exodus 14:21–2). The unbelievers meet their death (IIIb, Q. 26:66, see Exodus 14:27–8). This narrative, and the other six as well, reveals itself as a sign of God's omnipotence (*ʿizza*) by a refrain at the end: *Surely in that is a sign, yet most of them are not believers. Surely thy Lord, He is the All-mighty, the All-compassionate* (*inna fī dhālika la-āyatan wa-mā kāna aktharuhum muʾminīn, wa-inna rabbaka la-huwa'l-ʿazīzu'l-raḥīm*, Q. 26:67–8).[42]

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This story is closely linked to the one in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, but its narrative is much less empathetic and distinctly faster paced. It is not God's proximity but his omnipotence that is displayed here, the truth of which is proven against Pharaoh's presumptuous claims to power. This is in accordance with the Biblical story, although in the Qur'anic version, the diverse plagues remain unmentioned. Yet, the scene is dominated by the fear (*rahba*) inspired by God's greatness rather than by the attraction (*raghba*) of being safe, close to God. Thus, the call from the burning bush is not present in this narrative; the text goes straight into God's dispatch of his messenger, although Moses' reaction to the fear he feels (*my breast will be straightened*, *yaḍīqu ṣadrī*, Q. 26:13, see Exodus 4:10) provides an intratextual reference to Muhammad's corresponding experience. At the centre of this narrative is Moses' endeavour to stand his ground with the support of God's intervention, and, later, his miraculous parting of the sea according to God's instructions. Whereas in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* God offers paternal encouragement (Q. 20:17, Q. 20:36, Q. 20:82), in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ* there is a firmer tone, as is seen in His abrupt ordering of Moses to go to Pharaoh (Q. 26:10) and His rebuttal of Moses' hesitation to do so with a terse *No* (*kallā*, Q. 26.15).

Once again, there is a stylistic strand of expression running parallel to the semantic one: the fast rhythm is connected to the frequency of direct speech. Over long stretches, the narrative units are determined by direct speech. The dialogue between the praise of God (by Moses) and the disbelief in His omnipotence (by Pharaoh), in particular, reveals the extreme contrast between the eschatologically inspired perception of the messenger and his community, on the one hand, and the one-dimensional, worldly thinking of the unbelievers, on the other. The need for rhetorical dispute continues, but the watchword of friendly and patient discussions, 'gentle' (*layyinan*), expressed in Q. 20:44 is abandoned. While Moses maintains an elevated and hymnic style in his speech, the previously serene tone of *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* gives way to a tense one in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*. Instead of God's friendly reminder of Moses' miraculous rescue, the same retrospective is now part of Pharaoh's reproach: the crime that caused Moses' flight and his breach of the loyalty towards those who raised him. The prophethood reflected in the Moses narrative in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarā* has thus become more complex. A quick exchange of dialogue is the medium of dispute; obviously, the consolatory images of salvation history that were prevalent before are now less prominent. Here, Moses and Muhammad are not linked by a common experience with the transcendent, as in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, but by their common experience of persecution and the perception of

belonging to an exposed minority (*a small troop, shirdhimatun qalīlūn*, Q. 26:54) under threat of losing the right to live in their ancestral place. It is not only the prophet's predicament to be confronted with cynical opponents, but equally that of the community, as they are threatened by the aggressive, powerful authorities.

The Late Meccan Period

The suras of the late Meccan period are characterised by syntactically complex verses. The final phrase of the verse, that is, the *clausula*, is usually not part of the statement strand, but rather comments on the verse. It either qualifies a situation ethically or reiterates the attributes of God, which are set as the parameters of human action. *Clausulas* are metatextual recollections of the source of speech.[43] At the same time, they are pithy catechetical formulas that express the apparent consensus opinion of the community concerning the evaluation of the characters and events of the story. Most importantly, the recitation in its entirety has now attained a new status as the 'display' of the celestial scripture; the celestial scripture being conceived of as 'a kind of external storage facility'.[44] In the Medinan period, all aspects of the Qur'an thus increasingly come to enjoy scriptural status, though, earlier, in the middle Meccan era, only the Biblical stories seem to have had this status, with the more ephemeral parts of the suras (those concerned with the situation of the listeners) not being regarded as having originated from the scripture.[45] After three summary references to the story of Moses (Q. 11:96–110, Q. 14:5–8, Q. 44:17–33), there are four long Moses narratives to be found in the late Meccan period: Q. 40:23–53, Q. 28:1–46, Q. 10:75–93 and Q. 7:142–57. The first three will be discussed here, whereas the last of these narratives will be examined in chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures'.

Moses narrative in *Sūrat Ghāfir* (Q. 40:23–55)

The narrative within the sura

The sura is introduced by a brief affirmation of the revelation (*The sending down of the [Scripture] is from God the All-mighty, the All-knowing, tanzīlu'l-kitābi mina'l-llāhi'l-'azīzi'l-ḥakīm*, Q. 40:2, see also Q. 40:8); it displays the attributes of God in a hymn and touches upon the subjects of forgiveness and retribution. The introduction is followed by a polemical discussion of the subjects of unbelief and the disputation of the revealed verses which then leads to a contemplation of earlier rejections of the message (Q. 40:5–22). The middle part is occupied by the Moses–Pharaoh narrative (Q. 40:23–52), whose

epilogue (Q. 40:53–5) is followed by a polemic commentary (Q. 40:56–75). The sura ends with the encouragement of the Prophet (Q. 40:77–85). It recalls the missions of previous messengers (Q. 40:78) and the consequences faced by disbelievers, whose communities can now only be traced in the ruins of their destroyed habitations (Q. 40:82).

The reference to the ruins of the civilisations of the unbelieving peoples who suffered retribution in the past (*What, have they not journeyed in the land and beheld . . ., a-wa-lam yasīrū fī'l-arḍi fa-yanẓurū . . .*, Q. 40:21) is followed by only one example, that of Moses. Instead of beginning with the calling (Ia), the narrative starts with the messenger being sent on his mission (Ic, Q. 40:23–4, see Exodus 4:12). Moses is, however, sent not only to Pharaoh but to Korah and Haman,[46] three paragons of hubris. They respond to Moses' sermon by threatening to kill the male children of the believers (Q. 40:25); they also threaten Moses with death, as he endangers the established religion (Q. 40:26). The narrative dispenses with unequivocal references to the Biblical story.

Moses only has his trust in God as a weapon to face down those threats, but his further destiny is not mentioned. However, a character that remains anonymous is introduced in order to defend Moses, a local believer who had kept his belief hidden (Q. 40:28).[47] He gives a long conversion sermon which, like the suras of this period, recalls the earlier messengers as well, particularly emphasising Joseph, who is relevant because he is a predecessor of Moses and has Egyptian connections (Q. 40:29–35). Pharaoh replies to this sermon by stating his blasphemous intention to erect a tower from which to look upon Moses' God. This particular reference – which, not unlike the appearance of Haman in the Moses context, transfers a Mesopotamian emblem of power from the Babylonian context to Egypt – seems to echo the fusion of diverse traditions already reflected in apocryphal and Rabbinic literature.[48]

After a brief comment by the narrating voice exposing Pharaoh's hubris (*the evil of his deeds was decked out fair to Pharaoh – zuyyina li-Fir'awna sū'u 'amalihi*, Q. 40:37), there is a further sermon by the unnamed believer to his people (Q. 40:38–44) which ends, like Moses' earlier speech, with his feelings of resignation. The last section of the narrative dwells on the punishment for the unfaithful and finishes with an eschatological vision.

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Despite the narrative framework, the structure is that of a sermon; it is a text whose discursive elements can be recognised as arguments that would have been used by the proclaimer himself to respond to those within Meccan society. The story of the Biblical messenger merely provides the setting, for Moses leaves the stage as soon as he has entered it. Pharaoh, rather than being

the addressee of a prophetic message, becomes one among many in a crowd listening to a sermon by an anonymous believer. What is described is not so much an event in history but an example of the kind of perilous situation that those preaching conversion would have encountered. God's messenger and his followers are threatened by those in power. Their only recourse is to trust in God.

The strongest verdict in this sermon is the condemnation of *Those who dispute concerning the signs of God, without any authority* (*alladhīna yujādilūna fī āyāti'l-llāhi bi-ghayri sulṭān*, Q. 40:35). Indeed, this accusation is repeated twice after the story's conclusion (Q. 40:56 and 69), and indicates an increased polemical tone compared to *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'*. Negative perceptions dominate the sermon; it displays, in paraenetic form, all those negative statements that conclude the majority of its verses as *clausulas*, such as Q. 40:25: *But the guile of the unbelievers is ever in error* (*wa-mā kaydu'l-kāfirīna illā fī ḍalāl*) and Q. 40:28: *Surely God guides not him who is prodigal and a liar* (*inna'l-llāha lā yahdī man huwa musrifun kadhdhāb*).[49] Standing before Pharaoh, who represents unbelieving rulers or elites, the preacher's task becomes an arduous test; Pharaoh's shadow casts the world in a mostly negative light. Only recollection of the lasting other world can keep the hope for the future alive (*surely the world to come is the abode of stability – wa-inna'l-ākhirata hiya dāru'l-qarār*, Q. 40:39).

Moses narrative in *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* (Q. 28:1–46)

The narrative within the sura

As a contrasting foil for the sermon in Q. 40:23–55, the slightly later sura, *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* presents a chronological narrative (Q. 28:1–46). Unlike the familiar model seen in the previous suras where the narratives occupy the central section, this narrative is located at the very beginning of the sura; there, it is announced that the story of Moses and Pharaoh will be told truthfully (*bi'l-ḥaqq*, Q. 28:3). The story concludes with an affirmation of the revelation, and this extends into the next section of the sura (Q. 28:43–56). Following this is a polemical section (Q. 28:57–84) and finally, the concluding section, which entails a further affirmation of the revelation (Q. 28:85–8).

The narrative begins with God disclosing the divine intention behind the staging of Moses' mission: Pharaoh had divided his people (*ahlahu*) into factions and was now *abasing one party of them* (*yastaḍ'ifu ṭā'ifatan minhum*, Q. 28:4). However, according to divine decree, this oppressed party, not explicitly identified with the Israelites, will take over Pharaoh's leadership and

inherit his land (Q. 28:5–6) – a detail that does not appear in the Biblical record.

The salvation of Moses is related without reference to the oppression of the Israelites. In order to save the child Moses from Pharaoh's persecution of the infants, God orders Moses' mother to fearlessly abandon him on the river (IVa), so he may grow up to be the enemy of Pharaoh's people (Q. 28:8; for the Biblical story of how Moses came to live among Pharaoh's family, see Exodus 2:1–10). Pharaoh's consort adopts him, and Moses' sister ensures that his own mother becomes his wet nurse (Q. 28:12). Once grown up, Moses responds to the cry for help from a fellow Israelite and kills a man from the opposite party. He is threatened and fears revenge – a scene that is dramatically unfolded. However, an unknown, virtuous man – not unlike the anonymous believer from *Sūrat Ghāfir* – warns him that there are plans afoot to murder him (see Exodus 2:11–14). Moses escapes to Midian (IVc, see Exodus 2:15) where he helps two shepherdesses to water their animals by a well. Moses enters into a contract of service with their father and receives one of the daughters in marriage. After the period of the contract has expired, he and his family leave Midian and, on their journey, come to the place of his calling.

God calls to Moses from a burning bush in the sacred valley and reveals Himself to him (Ia, Q. 28:29–30, see Exodus 3:1–5). He introduces Moses to the art of magic, showing him two signs, the transformation of his staff and the healing of the leprous hand (Ib, Q. 28:32, see Exodus 4:6–7). Both are intended to prove God's power to Pharaoh (Ib, Q. 28:32). Moses, afraid of his mission, asks for his brother Aaron to be sent alongside him. The Biblical purpose of Moses' challenge of Pharaoh, his intervention for the Israelites, is glossed over.

Pharaoh rejects Moses and his signs, and accuses him of sorcery (IIb, Q. 28:36, see Exodus 7:8–13). Pharaoh's response is mocking: he will have a tower erected from which he can look upon Moses' God (Q. 28:38) – a narrative detail that reconnects the story of Pharaoh to earlier post-Biblical traditions (as it does in *Sūrat Ghāfir*). Pharaoh's hubris is repaid with worldly punishment when he drowns in the sea (IIIb, Q. 28:40). Yet, there is no further account of what is at the heart of the Biblical story – the Israelites' exodus; there is no collective salvation from Pharaoh as in Exodus 14:26–31. The focus is on Pharaoh, who, as the acme of evil, together with his people will suffer punishment in the other world on Judgement Day. The narrative concludes with a confirmation that God gave Moses the scripture (VI, Q. 28:43) as a gift of guidance and grace to humankind. An epilogue reminds Muhammad that he is not a witness to these events but owes his knowledge of them only to the mercy of his Lord.

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This narrative is obviously concerned with chronological precision and factual completeness. It thus dispenses with a dramatic retrospective narration and an extensive exposition of the crucial moment of Moses' calling to prophethood; the call is related only as a framework for Moses' initiation into the art of magic. The narrative is linear, with a new direction of thrust that is aimed at conveying God's omniscience, especially in relation to the evildoers who *were not aware* (*wa-hum lā yashʿurūn*, Q. 28:9 and 11). Additionally, there are indications of a new style in the narrative. The characters are now marked in advance as either negative or positive: thus Pharaoh, who in earlier instances gained depth through his own speech and actions, has become a stereotype here. He is portrayed as one *of the workers of corruption* (*mina'l-mufsidīn*, Q. 28:4; see also *kānū khāṭi'īn* in Q. 28:8 indicating that he was one *of the sinners*) who will be a leader of the damned even in the other world (*leaders, calling to the Fire – a'immatan yadʿūna ilā'l-nār*, Q. 28:41). As a character, Moses is downsized: he is a fearful and meek person, as illustrated by his words in Q. 28:22 (*'It may be that my Lord will guide me on the right way' – 'asā rabbī an yahdiyanī sawā'a'l-sabīl*) and Q. 28:24: *O my Lord, surely I have need of whatever good Thou shalt have sent down upon me – rabbī innī li-mā anzalta ilayya min khayrin faqīr*). As the needy recipient of God's guidance, Moses is not portrayed in continual and direct communication with God, as he was in the previously discussed suras, but receives consolation and encouragement from other mortals. Thus, it is his employer rather than God directly who answers his prayer for deliverance (*'My Lord, deliver me from the people of the evildoers' – rabbī najjinī mina'l-qawmi'l-ẓālimīn*, Q. 28:21) with words of consolation (*'Be not afraid; thou hast escaped from the people of the evildoers' – lā takhaf najawta mina'l-qawmi'l-fāsiqīn*, Q. 28:25).[50] Under these circumstances, Moses is even less of an ideal type than in previous narratives. Not only does he commit a crime, albeit unintentionally, and has to be saved from the consequences, but he has to listen to some harsh words from a witness to the act who accuses him of violence (Q. 28:19). In Midian he is a stranger and is unprotected; he lives as a dependent for a long time in the service of his father-in-law. The apologetic tone of the Moses story seems to resound in the metanarrative comment in Q. 28:44–6, where the proclaimer is reminded that he was not witness to the events related, but was granted knowledge of them so that he might be a warner himself (i.e. so that he might restage Moses' ministry of preaching to unbelievers).

For the first time, the people of Moses, the Israelites, are excluded from the story. It is unclear if the abased group in Q. 28:4 is an oblique reference to

them, or if, in the particular context of this sura, they are not regarded as an essential part of the Moses paradigm.[51] In any case, their absence from the section on Pharaoh's punishment, which had always been perceived as inextricably linked to the exodus event, is striking. Instead, this sura presents an argument between good and bad, in which God and Pharaoh are the opposing powers with opposing intentions for the group of the oppressed. Moses' destiny is part of God's extensive plan to overthrow the unbelievers and stop the oppression. For the late Meccan audience listening to this story, the narrative becomes reassuring proof that the divine plan will triumph in the end.

Moses narrative in *Sūrat Yūnus* (Q. 10:75–93)

The narrative within the sura

Sūrat Yūnus is introduced by the announcement of a recitation from scripture (*Those are the signs of the Wise* [*Scripture*] *– tilka āyātu'l-kitābi'l-ḥakīm*, Q. 10:1) and a subsequent hymn (Q. 10:2–6). This is followed by its main section, consisting of eschatology and polemic (Q. 10:11–36), an affirmation of the revelation and encouragement of the Prophet, and finally an eschatological conclusion (Q. 10:37–60). An additional substantial section (Q. 10:61–93) contains a further affirmation of the revelation, followed by two prophetic legends about Noah and Moses. The third section of the sura is its concluding part (Q. 10:94–109); here, again, is found an affirmation of the revelation, as well as lessons to be learnt from history.

The Moses narrative is fragmentary. It reports Moses' and Aaron's mission to Pharaoh and his council (Ib, Q. 10:75, Exodus 4:13–17), here introduced as a group of proud and sinful people. The display of the signs (Q. 10:75) provokes Pharaoh to stage a contest (Q. 10:79–82) which, however, does not convince the Egyptians of Moses' message. It is noteworthy that the narrative purposefully conflates two discourses of sorcery: the actual acts of magic and the effects achieved through the presentation of the message. Thus, Pharaoh, on hearing the verbally pronounced signs, believes the messengers are sorcerers – an accusation commonly made against the proclaimer (see e.g. Q. 74:24 and Q. 52:15). Pharaoh furthermore reproaches the messengers for intending to make his people renounce the customs of their forefathers (IIa, Q. 10:78). The entire discourse is independent of the Biblical story.

The contest of sorcery is then ordered, obviously after Moses had first performed his miraculous signs (IIc, Q. 10:79). Moses predicts that the sorcerers' efforts will be annulled by his divine signs, but only a few of the observers are won over, and these are all members of his own people (IIc,

Q. 10:83). The focus at this point shifts to Moses' community: Moses receives the divine order to build houses for the Israelites and furnish them with indications of the direction of prayer (IIe, Q. 10:87), to perform the prayer and encourage them to believe. His prayer for material dispossession and for the hardening of the hearts of the oppressors is answered. Finally, the exodus through the sea takes place (III, Q. 10:90). Pharaoh, in pursuit of the Israelites, tries to save himself at the last moment by professing his faith in the God of the Israelites (IIIc, Q. 10:90) – a scene unknown from the Bible but reported in a Rabbinic source.[52] His rescue is, as Sinai has convincingly argued, denied to him, and the deliverance of his body will serve as an example to later generations. The episode is not related in any of the other Moses–Pharaoh narratives, and points to a new interest in the emotional situation of the narrative protagonists and in the issue of repentance. The story is followed by an afterword that states the favoured position of the Israelites (*And We settled the Children of Israel in a sure settlement – wa-laqad bawwa'nā banī Isrā'īla mubawwa'a ṣidqin*, Q. 10:93), despite which they fell out of favour after they received 'the knowledge'.

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This narrative proposes a new scenario compared to the previous narratives: the Israelites are portrayed as a group particularly favoured by God. As a result, their experience must be exemplary for the Meccan believers as well; hence the introduction of the *qibla* and the duty to perform ritual prayer imposed on them, both of which are measures intended for the guidance and strengthening of an oppressed group. The reference to these two ritual acts may be taken as the expression of an important new reality in the Meccan community, where the *ṣalāt* and the taking up of the *qibla* have become central acts of piety before the *hijra*. The deep impression made by the introduction of obligatory prayer and the achievement of a communal prayer, the *Fātiḥa*, is discernible in several suras of the middle and late Meccan periods, which evoke the *Fātiḥa* either explicitly or through intertextual references (see e.g. *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* and *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*).[53] The introduction of the *qibla* to Jerusalem is once again reflected in *Sūrat al-Isrā'*.[54] It is remarkable that the verb used for the Prophet's night journey in Q. 17:1, *asrā*, is the same one that had been used in reference to Moses' exodus in Q. 20:77, Q. 26:52 and Q. 44:23. Through the use of this verb, the two images – Moses' exodus and Muhammad's nocturnal journey – overlap. Moses' introduction of the *qibla* provided the historical link for an institution that was still new to the Muslim community. It connected them to a group with whom they must have felt close kinship in their oppression: the Israelites on the brink of their exodus. The explicit association

of the Jerusalem *qibla* with the Israelites enhances the notion that the Muslim community's prayer is part of the heritage from Biblical salvation history, into which they strive to be integrated.

Conclusion: The Qur'an, a Mirror of History

Muhammad's path to becoming a prophet is a central religious development accompanying the Qur'an's historical formation. By resuming a role already shaped by eminent predecessors, he performs the important act of making the past present. Moses' experience in particular illustrates all the psychological contours involved in becoming a prophet: meeting the transcendent God, feeling insufficient strength in the face of the mission, experiencing fear and overcoming it, and ultimately finding strength to persevere in the face of humiliation. Muhammad was able to perceive all these clearly through the mirror of Moses' life and could thus experience his own life as part of salvation history, guided by God. That Muhammad's own destiny to lead his community out of social and spiritual oppression would one day become a parallel to Moses' exodus could not have been predicted in Mecca. Far more important was the idea of a spiritual outlet that the exodus model was offering. Thus, Moses' exodus was first of all understood as the prefiguration of Muhammad's own spiritual exit from the space of Meccan oppression, his translation to Jerusalem, which he was graced with years before the actual *hijra* (see Q. 17:1) and which his community emulated by praying towards Jerusalem. The event that was later, in Medina, understood as typologically closely related to the exodus is the Battle of Badr, which proved the Prophet Muhammad to be a second Moses. He had achieved both of Moses' great accomplishments: providing his community with a scripture – though an oral, not a written one – and saving them from annihilation at the hands of their enemies.[55]

Looking back over the Meccan Moses narratives, we find them embedded in diverse discourses: in the early Meccan period of *Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt*, the story forms part of a debate about the authority of the messenger. Later, in the middle Meccan era of *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*, it partakes in the construction of an imagined textual world counter to the oppressive reality of the nascent Qur'anic community. Still later, the story is employed to show the vicissitudes of the prophetical vocation with its constant challenges; here, at first, in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, Moses and Muhammad are linked by a positive gift, the shared experience of a spiritual encounter, afterwards, in *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'*, however, by their common experience of persecution and their shared perception of belonging to a threatened minority. The situation becomes even more dire in late Meccan times when, in *Sūrat Ghāfir*, the proclaimer imagines himself as

standing before Pharaoh in a world which now appears mostly negative. The narrative of *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*, in comparison, offers a consolation as the divine direction of events is revealed to be effective beyond the everyday reality of oppression. In *Sūrat Yūnus*, Moses appears as the predecessor of the proclaimer, who is portrayed on the brink of his exodus. Moses' explicit connection with the Jerusalem *qibla* enhances the significance of prayer, with its imagined translocation to a Biblical space – a desirable means of shelter from the real world.

Though a linear movement is obviously not traceable in the narrative sequence, the stories related in the Meccan suras do display development. Moses consistently moves closer to the centre of the textual counter world being constructed from the Biblical tradition. His character eventually becomes the focus of the transformation process that the world of the community undergoes and that liberates the proclaimer's followers from the oppressive reality of Mecca.

In trying to evaluate the relation of the Moses narratives to history, one could apply Marco Schöller's phrase of the 'accidental historicity of Qur'anic statements'.[56] In comparison to the other two monotheistic scriptures, the Qur'an's focus does not lie essentially with the external chronology, but with the meaning of the events depicted. What has been shown for the Moses stories could be claimed for other narrative plots as well, most evidently for the stories of Noah,[57] Abraham[58] and Mary.[59] Yet, apart from storytelling, there is a clearly traceable sequence of discourses that successively bundle together the individual ministries of the diverse prophets to form an overarching salvation project (a *Heilsplan*) with clearly discernible stages. This, however, transpires only when the Qur'an is investigated diachronically. Indeed, a continuous commitment to historical chronology is absent from the text, though an interest in the chronological order of events does emerge occasionally as we observed in *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*. A rough historical framework for the events related may also be taken to have been part of the listeners' knowledge. Alleged anachronisms on the other hand – such as the bundling of Pharaoh, Haman and Korah – reflect exegetical developments current in Late Antiquity. Indeed, what had provoked the verdict of the Qur'an's repetitiveness, its alleged disinterest in history and its affinity for cyclical narration, was the characteristic of a rather small segment of the text primarily concerned with the imminent catastrophe – which was considered to be foreshadowed in the early Meccan retribution stories.

One should, perhaps, look for another kind of relation to history. The Qur'an, we might say, first and foremost reflects the historical development of its own perception of the past by telling stories from different perspectives that

change with time and space. While it would be a utopian endeavour to try to arrange a continuous history of events, Biblical or Qur'anic, a history of the evolving world view of Muhammad and his community – expressed through the narratives – could certainly be attempted. By giving up the ideal of a linear development of Qur'anic texts and instead assuming an unpredictable growth of textual extensions from an early nucleus, developing along the stages of the community's religious education, scholarship will come closer to a full understanding of the Qur'an. A new reading of the Qur'anic narratives under the aspect of the canonical process should be the first step.

NOTES

1 See Sinai, 'The Qur'an as Process'.
2 For the relation between the Qur'an and history, see Neuwirth, *Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 613–23; eadem, 'Qur'an and History'.
3 See Donner, *Narratives*, p. 84.
4 See Hans Zirker, *Christentum und Islam: Theologische Verwandtschaft und Konkurrenz* (Düsseldorf, 1989), p. 68.
5 Rotraud Wielandt, *Offenbarung und Geschichte im Denken moderner Muslime* (Wiesbaden, 1971), pp. 24–36.
6 It is, however, not altogether clear to what degree the long Medinan suras were available to the editors as predetermined units.
7 However, adopting this particular practice of using scriptural texts in liturgy (which had become prevalent within the early community) meant renouncing the theologically well-founded pericopic edition of scripture, so particularly effective in Judaism and Christianity. For a comparison of the three ways of reading scripture as a representation of salvation history in the framework of the annual cycle of feasts, see Angelika Neuwirth, 'Three Religious Feasts: Between Narratives of Violence and Liturgies of Reconciliation', in Thomas Scheffler, ed., *Religion: Between Violence and Reconciliation* (Beirut, 2002), pp. 49–82.
8 Concerning such gratuitously undertaken cuts performed in some suras, see chapter 5, 'Recitation'.
9 The close link between real events and individual revelations in the memory of the early community has been highlighted by Radtke, *Offenbarung*.
10 Some scholars even speak of a Qur'anic 'inlibration'; see chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'.
11 Kermani, *Gott ist schön*, p. 97, quoting from Hans-Robert Jauss, 'Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft', in Rainer Warning, ed., *Rezeptionsästhetik: Theorie und Praxis* (Munich, 1994), p. 130.
12 The canonical process and the canonical approach have been examined and applied in diverse chapters of this volume; see, in particular, chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'.
13 On the subject of the Qur'anic narrative in general, see Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, pp. 141–3; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 225–363; Busse, *Theologische Beziehungen*, pp. 96–106; Roberto Tottoli, *I profeti biblici nella tradizione islamica* (Brescia, 1999), pp. 57–63. Translated into English as *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, 2002); Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 653–71.
14 See Deuteronomy 34:10–12 (end of the Pentateuch).
15 See Goitein, 'Ramadan'.
16 Regarding Qur'anic heroes, I respectfully disagree with Jaroslav Stetkevych who, in his

study *Muhammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth* (Bloomington, IN, 1996), sweepingly denies that the protagonists of Qur'anic narratives possess the quality of epic heroes; see chapter 14, 'Myths'.

17 Stories on Moses are found in narrative form only in the Meccan passages of the Qur'an. For the appearance of these stories in the Medinan suras, where they constitute reminiscences rather than narratives, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 653–71, and the concise version in chapter 14, 'Myths'.

18 For Nöldeke's relative chronology, see Nöldeke *et al.*, *Die Geschichte des Korantextes*.

19 See chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

20 See chapter 4, 'Images'.

21 In addition, there are some other references to Moses: Q. 87:19, Q. 53:36, Q. 51:38–40. Moses' opponent, Pharaoh, is also known to the listeners from the retribution stories: Q. 89:10, Q. 85:18; he is furthermore mentioned with reference to Moses in Q. 79:17, Q. 73:16.

22 An analysis of the phonetic form of this narrative can be found in Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, pp. 177–83. For a commentary on *Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt* in its entirety, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 394–414.

23 See chapter 4, 'Images'.

24 Uri Rubin has proposed to understand Towa (usually taken as a proper name) in the sense of 'twice', building on both Islamic exegetical and Rabbinic sources. The translation of the verse would thus be: 'When his Lord called to him in the twice hallowed valley'. Uri Rubin, 'In Defence of the Qur'anic *Textus Receptus*', Paper presented at the Twelfth International Conference, 'From Jāhiliyya to Islam', the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 24–28 June 2012. This article will appear in the 2013 issue of *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*.

25 See van Ess, 'Vision and Ascension'; Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 465–9; chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.

26 *Leave Me . . . (dharnī)*: Q. 74:11, Q. 73:11, Q. 68:44; *leave them (dharhum)*: Q. 70:42, Q. 52:45.

27 For this Qur'anic genre, see Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*; David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur'anic Study* (Surrey, 1999).

28 See chapter 5, 'Recitation'.

29 See chapter 4, 'Images'.

30 The Moses narrative is also recalled in reminiscences: Q. 19:51–3, Q. 25:35, Q. 17:2 and Q. 17:101–4. Concerning *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, see chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.

31 This is the essential purpose of their voicing a *zajra* (see Q. 79:13–14). In *Sūrat al-Ṣāffāt*, the angelic shouts at the same time serve another purpose: to expel the demons that try to come near the heavenly assembly.

32 This is clear from the words of the liturgy of St Chrysostomos (Great Introit): 'We [the believers] that represent the Cherubs in a mystical way'.

33 See chapter 6, *'Fātiḥa'*.

34 This intertextuality finds a parallel in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, which suggests that by the middle Meccan period, the communal prayer had already been received; see chapter 7, 'Referentiality'.

35 See Neuwirth, 'Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory'.

36 The Qur'an is alluding to Exodus 4:6–7 where the hand 'is diseased as white as snow', *metsora'at* (usually understood as leprosy).

37 See chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures'.

38 For other Biblical intertexts, apart from the exodus narrative, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, p. 326.

39 See Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, pp. 282–3; idem, *The Bible as it Was*, pp. 423–4.

40 See Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 329–32.

41 Rippin, 'Muḥammad in the Qur'ān', p. 299. Refusing to interpret the Qur'an on the basis of the *sīra*, Rippin attempts to read *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā* without any reference to the biography of

Muhammad. While actually filling in the verses with details from the Prophet's life is questionable, in my view there cannot be any doubt of the relationship between the figures of the messengers and the 'thou' of the Prophet. The Moses narratives in particular, with their recurring interpretation of the messengers' destiny as a life guided by God, prove that this is a constant theme of the prophetic type. Their numerous intertextual references to Muhammad can hardly be ignored.

42 This is also found in Q. 26:8–9, 103–4, 174–5, 190–1 and partially in Q. 26:140 and 159. Contrast this with the might of Pharaoh (Q. 26:44).

43 For more on *clausulas*, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 157–70; eadem, 'Zur Struktur der *Yūsuf*-Sure', pp. 123–52.

44 This classification is Sinai's; see Sinai, 'Qur'ānic Self-Referentiality', p. 119.

45 For details of this, see Neuwirth, 'Discovery of Writing'.

46 Korah (Ar. Qārūn) is a negative figure from the exodus narrative who appears in the Qur'an, always in connection with Pharaoh (see also Q. 29:39, Q. 28:76 and 79); see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 231–2; Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, p. 131. Haman, a figure familiar from Esther 3, however, is Persian and not Egyptian. He is presented in the Qur'an as one of Pharaoh's councillors (Q. 28:38; for other appearances of Haman, see Q. 28:6 and 8, Q. 29:39, Q. 40:24 and 36). In Rabbinic tradition, he had already been connected with Korah; see Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, p. 165; Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, p. 284; Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, p. 149. Pharaoh and Haman are closely connected in the post-Biblical tradition; for a lucid explanation of the history of their relationship see Adam Silverstein, 'The Qur'anic Pharaoh', in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, pp. 467–77.

47 Concerning this scene, see Heribert Busse, 'Antioch and its Prophet Ḥabīb al-Najjār', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), pp. 155–79.

48 See Silverstein, 'The Qur'anic Pharaoh'. Pharaoh's desire to climb up to God by means of 'the cords' is not fulfilled; such use of the cords is elsewhere allowed to Qur'anic figures; see Kevin van Bladel, 'Heavenly Cords and Prophetic Authority in the Quran and its Late Antique Context', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70 (2007), pp. 223–46.

49 See also Q. 40:31, 33–5 and 43.

50 See also his comforting: *'Thou shalt assuredly find me, if God wills, one of the righteous' (satajidunī in shā'a'llāhu mina'l-ṣāliḥīn*, Q. 28:27).

51 They reappear in the two later Meccan suras, *Sūrat Yūnus* and *Sūrat al-A'rāf*; see chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures'.

52 Sinai pursues the complex track of the episode's transmission through extra-Qur'anic tradition and classifies it typologically. He also stresses its function, which is to warn the unbelievers of missing the chance of repentance before death is imminent; see Nicolai Sinai, 'Pharaoh's Submission to God in the Qur'an and in Rabbinic Literature: A Case Study in Qur'anic Intertextuality' (Forthcoming in a volume edited by Holger Zellentin).

53 Concerning *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*, see chapter 7, 'Referentiality'.

54 See chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.

55 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 669–71.

56 Marco Schöller, *Exegetisches Denken und Prophetenbiographie: Eine quellenkritische Analyse der Sīra-Überlieferung zu Muḥammad's Konflikt mit den Juden* (Wiesbaden, 1998), p. 85.

57 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 623–33; chapter 14, 'Myths'.

58 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 634–52; chapter 14, 'Myths'.

59 See chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary'.

11

Oral Scriptures in Contact: The Qur'anic Story of the Golden Calf and its Position between Narrative, Cult and Inter-communal Debate*

Introduction

Dilemmas

ANY STUDY focusing on the emergence of the Qur'an has to make a preliminary decision about its perspective: does the text as we have it reflect the oral, interactive process of communication that took place between the Prophet Muhammad and his listeners in Mecca and Medina at a determinable period of time before Islam became an established religion? Or, is the Qur'an the product of a compilation of text units from diverse traditions emanating from a monotheistic sectarian milieu, a text whose origin in time and place remains obscure and whose literary character is of little avail in its interpretation?[1] The latter is held to be true by most modern scholars who consider the redaction under Islamic auspices, not the preceding stages of text genesis, to be the birth event of the Qur'an, a point before which no reliable knowledge of the text can be obtained, except from evidence external to the Qur'an itself.

This epistemically pessimistic option sets a decisive course for Qur'anic studies. Once the process of the interactive creation of the text by an individual proclaimer and his listeners is negated, the text becomes virtually stripped of its literary code, that is, all those features that the text owes to the intention of its author/proclaimer – instances of intertextuality, puns, allusions and self-referential remarks, for example – can no longer be determined and, so,

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Meccan Texts – Medinan Additions? Politics and the Re-reading of Liturgical Communications', in Rüdiger Arnzen and Jörn Thielmann, eds., *Words, Texts, and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea* (Leuven, Peeters, 2004), pp. 71–93. Reprinted by kind permission of the publisher.

the rhetorical process of persuasion pursued in the text can no longer be traced. In these hypotheses, the possibility that the Qur'an represents a work in progress reflecting the evolution of a Qur'anic discourse over a period time is superseded by the notion that it is a fixed document containing definite, historically detached statements. The view within the field thus shifts away from the Qur'an as a dramatic text to the Qur'an as a historical archive.

To regain access to the text as a literary artefact, the history-based arguments put forward against the genuineness of the Qur'an must be countered with observations on its form, which is indicative of a particular scenario of genesis. It is evident that the Qur'anic text betrays a fashioning hand. All the Qur'anic verses are rhymed, and many suras are structured according to a sophisticated pattern of interrelated ideas and employ effective devices of rhetoric which attest to an ongoing process of debate. These features have been widely obscured by the arrangement of the suras, which were catalogued – in what may be described as a mechanical, archival manner – according to their length. We thus have to distinguish between two manifestations of the Qur'an: one which the text itself calls *qur'ān* (i.e. the message, the recitation), the result of an early interactive communication process, and another later manifestation called the *muṣḥaf*, which is in the shape of the fixed text as we know it. How do these manifestations of the Qur'an relate to the canon problem? The question of when and how the Qur'an was officially affirmed by the community as their 'canon' has thus to be answered on diverse levels. On the one hand – proceeding from the *muṣḥaf* – canonisation has been identified by some scholars as having occurred with the publication of the *ne varietur* text during the reign of 'Uthmān, some twenty-five years after the death of Muhammad; by other scholars, this is linked with the acceptance of the text as a juridical source that occurred later. However, once one proceeds from the thesis that canonisation occurred during the communication of the *qur'ān* itself, a corpus which would not have emerged and been deemed worth preserving without the listeners' acceptance, the question extends much further back in time to a period before the text was codified.

At this point it is worth recalling the typological distinction made by Aleida and Jan Assmann between a 'canon from above' and a 'canon from below'. The 'canon from below' particularly underlines the social aspect, whereas the 'canon from above' focuses on the cognitive aspect. The canon from above can be described as power-oriented, whereas the canon from below relies on charisma, that is, a truth not warranted by an institution but by a person. The bearer of charisma is followed by a group of the faithful who submit themselves to his word, which they consider ultimately binding: 'Whenever the message is preserved to survive beyond the situation in which the original group was

directly interacting, it will usually undergo a profound change in structure. The message gains a new appearance through scripturalization and moreover, through institutionalization."[2]

A canonical process

The perspective assumed here is that the essential traits of the Qur'anic suras reflect a 'canonisation from below', only later complemented by a 'canonisation from above'. How does this canonisation from below proceed? An approach that helps us to discern the textual signs that point to such a development is the so-called canonical approach developed by Childs, and modified by Dohmen and Oeming who opened it up to diachronic investigations.[3] Dohmen and Oeming propose to understand the genesis of a canon as a process of growth. The canon in this context no longer covers the officially codified final form of a text, but refers to a binding covenantal character inherent in the texts which is affirmed by continuous references of later emerging text units to an earlier text nucleus. Thus, there are recurrent instances of intratextuality within the Qur'an.

Based on multiple criteria, it appears possible to identify the Qur'anic text nucleus around which the canonical process may have unfolded in the monothematic short suras that focus on the simple discourse of human gratefulness and ungratefulness, and divine punishment. These texts are continuously referred to and commented on in the longer and more complex suras that mirror new and more sophisticated discourses. Thus, the ensuing discourse which could be labelled 'salvation history' remodels the simple form of divine–human interaction in the light of the experience of the Biblical prophets and the elect, the Israelites. This discourse after the *hijra* grows into the related discourse of 'Biblical scripture contested between the community and the living heirs of the Biblical tradition', particularly the Jews of Medina. The canonical process, however, does not manifest itself only in the development of new discourses that emerge from each other or unfold around each other. One has to keep in mind that the discourses are not exclusively textual phenomena, but are equally socially conditioned since they are personalised in an exegetical community that performs canonising tasks. It may allow for the integration of ideological outsiders. A case in point is the invitation extended to the Medinan Jews by the Qur'anic community to join their ranks at an early stage of their cohabitation in Medina; it is this type of communication process that will be the focus of this chapter. The exegetical community, on the other hand, may work towards the excommunication of individuals or groups as well: some Qur'anic texts reflect such an attitude towards the poets,[4] a number of whom were persecuted for their polemical

stance against the new religious movement; other verses comment on the even more blatant case of the expulsion and, finally, execution of Medinan Jews.[5] The final discourse in the Qur'anic canonical process might best be identified as nation (*umma*) building. The phenomenon of the partially intertwined discourses, whose particular sequences are irreversible, thus, strongly support the hypothesis of a pre-redactional Qur'an, that is, of a communication process between a speaker and his audience, of a *qur'ān* that underlies the transmitted *muṣḥaf* as we have it.

Reading the Qur'an as a pre-redaction text, that is, considering the sequence of the individual texts as an ongoing drama staged between the proclaimer and his audience, will, finally, allow for a full realisation of the dimension of the Qur'an's self-referentiality as a manifestation of intratextuality. Qur'anic text sections cannot be adequately explored through a mere synchronic reading that views them horizontally as discrete units in juxtaposition. Only a diachronic reading that views them vertically as integrated units, where supra-texts have been built upon subtexts, can reveal the ongoing historical communication process which distinguishes the Qur'an from other scriptures – a feature that seems to have deterred scholars from considering its possibility. Read in this way, the Qur'an will present itself as a continuous dialogue in which questions were raised and answers were given, only for questions to be raised and responded to again later.

Dialogical reading as a method of sounding out the historical debates within the community can be best demonstrated through a discussion of texts that clearly mirror intratextuality, such as the Medinan additions to Meccan texts. The following study of the Qur'anic readings of the story of the golden calf is a case in point.[6] Such a reading, of course, has to comply with Rippin's demand to extend the scope of reading the Qur'an beyond the transmitted Qur'anic text, by including those discourses of the Near Eastern religious communities that may have played a role at the time of the emergence of the Qur'an.[7] This is particularly fruitful with the Medinan texts, where narratives are no longer meant primarily to remind the community of Biblical historical precedents, as may have been the case with the Meccan narratives, but which much more frequently serve to comment on earlier related accounts, reviewing them in light of new theological and thus religio-political discourses. Real debates, the backdrop of the Qur'anic texts, are particularly evident in the Medinan additions to Meccan texts which reflect the more sophisticated thinking of the listeners from Medina with its religiously more differentiated society. Since we may assume that the community in Medina would have encountered adherents of diverse religious traditions and would have been confronted with their beliefs not in the shape of closed scriptures, but –

as Madigan has lucidly argued[8] – in the shape of oral communications and ritual dramatisations, particular theological discourses about scriptural issues can be expected to rise to the fore. Thus, to talk about the story of the golden calf, for instance, implies – as Hawting has demonstrated[9] – a recollection of the discourse of divine wrath and human atonement, an issue that is closely related to the imposition of fasting, as will be shown below.

The Story of the Golden Calf in the Meccan Suras

The earliest text: *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, Q. 20:83–98

The story of Moses as a messenger and leader of his people is told eight times in the Meccan suras,[10] without, however, much attention being paid to the episode of the golden calf. Only in two of these texts does the event figure prominently. It first appears in the rather early Meccan *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*. There, it fills the last part (Q. 20:83–98) of a long and detailed vita of Moses which occupies the bulk of the sura (Q. 20:9–99) which gives a particularly empathetic account of Moses' career. The story of the golden calf in this early text is still purely edifying, paying equal attention to the diverse events in the life of Moses. It provides a Qur'anic version of the Biblical narrative, featuring Moses as a prophet blessed with a particularly intimate relationship with God. The text refrains from adopting any particular theological position that might be deduced from the Biblical model; few, if any, exegetical remarks within the story allow us to discover a particular theological discourse underlying its presentation, if not the message that the fate of Moses and his people should be understood as a typological precedent of that of Muhammad and his community.

The account of the golden calf is restricted to the basic facts (compare with Exodus 32:15–27):[11] during Moses' temporary absence from his people, a divine trial occurred which the Israelites failed to pass. The episode starts with God telling Moses about that trial – a strikingly non-dramatic start to the narrative which also does without references to such momentous events as the giving of the tablets or to the unique location where the encounter takes place. Moses returns to his people and learns about their relapse into idolatry. The blame for this terrible transgression, however, is not placed on the members of the community – Aaron is soon exonerated – but on a figure unknown from the Biblical account, named al-Sāmirī (the Samaritan),[12] who is accused of having seduced the people into producing the idol that has been venerated, in spite of Aaron's warning. Moses, accepting the excuses of his brother, turns his anger on al-Sāmirī, who is – very much like the seducer par excellence,

Iblīs – cursed and expelled. The entire story of Moses ending in this unexpected scenario of reconciliation instead of retaliation is concluded by a praise of God's uniqueness.

It is obvious that the long story, which is sympathetic not only to Moses but to the Israelites as well, does not go far beyond the scope of re-narrating the Biblical story. It relates the events as an example of earlier prophetic experiences with crisis in order to demonstrate that even the most desperate situations will finally turn into triumph; the tribulations of the prophets should be viewed as the prototype for the events that befall Muhammad and his community. Although the episode of the golden calf is the concluding story of the Moses account, there is no trace of the crucial role that the story plays in Jewish tradition, where a Talmudic dictum says: 'There is not a misfortune that Israel has suffered which is not related to the sin of the calf.'[13] The story could thus be classified as a hagiographic account, unrelated to any particular theological discourse.

It is all the more surprising that theological issues in striking contradiction to the reconciliatory tendency were introduced in a later period when the story received an extension, easily recognisable as a Medinan addition by its particular rhetorical shape.[14] It interrupts the narrative about the historical Israelites, the Banū Isrā'īl, by directly addressing their progeny, the Jews, admonishing them no longer in an empathetic but instead in a severe tone to beware of God's wrath. The addition is placed in the caesura between the very short account of the Exodus (Q. 20:77–9) and the story of the golden calf (Q. 20:83–98):

Q. 20:80–82:

80 *Children of Israel, We delivered you from your enemy;*
and We made covenant with you upon the right side of the Mount,
and sent down on you manna and quails:
81 *'Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you; but exceed not therein, or My anger shall alight on you;*
and on whomsoever My anger alights, that man is hurled to ruin.
82 *Yet I am All-forgiving to him who repents and believes, and does righteousness, and at last is guided.'*

These verses thus shift the speech from a report to a direct address, particularly targeting those listening to the Prophet. Although such appeals to listeners are frequent in Qur'anic narratives, this case is special insofar as the group addressed, the Medinan Jews, had not been part of the Prophet's listeners when the story was composed at Mecca, but entered the stage only at a later

date, thus necessitating an adaptation of the text to fit the new situation. Although the addition also serves to summarise essential episodes in the history of the Israelites that had been neglected in the plain narrative – God's covenant and His providing the Israelites with heavenly food – its exhortative comment refers to an event whose account is still to follow, the Israelites' sin of idolatry, their adoration of the golden calf.[15] The extension uses the issue of food as a vantage point from which to provide an admonition to *exceed not* (Q. 20:81) – probably in the respecting of dietary laws – and culminates in a threat of divine wrath that can only be avoided through repentance, belief and good deeds. Such a focus on wrath would have been alien to the Meccan manifestations of the divine; it points to a new discourse which would likely have been inspired by an increasing interest in the theological dimension of Biblical concepts. On closer look, Q. 20:81–3 is indeed reminiscent of a particularly momentous scriptural verse which is the *locus classicus* of the idea of guilt and atonement in the Biblical context: Exodus 34:6–7, a text that belongs to the immediate context of the Biblical story of the golden calf.

Exodus 34:6–7:

6 And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed,
the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering,
and abundant in goodness and truth,
7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty;
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

In that verse, which offers a unique divine self-description revealed to Moses when he was given the new set of tablets, the image of God as both wrathful and forgiving has taken most expressive shape. It displays what Jewish tradition has labelled the 'thirteen attributes' of God that all connect with wrath or mercy. They figure prominently in the liturgy of the Jewish Day of Atonement from early times onwards and thus would have been familiar to the Medinan Jews contemporary to the early Muslim community. In the Qur'anic counterpart to that text, which equally focuses on the notions of forgiveness (*ghafūr*, Q. 20:82) and wrathfulness (*ghaḍab*, Q. 20:81), the Biblical threat of a divine retaliation over generations is alleviated; yet the menace prevails and can be escaped only by repentance (*man tāba* Q. 20:82). The insertion that relates the Biblical event to a contemporary offence is not unique to *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*; it will be encountered again in later texts.

The extended version: *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*, Q. 7:142–57

A more extensive account of the episode of the golden calf is presented in the late Meccan text *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* (Q. 7:142–57).[16]

Q. 7:142–57 (the Medinan additions are Q. 7:145–7 and Q. 7:152–3 and 155g–7):

142 *And We appointed with Moses thirty nights*
and We completed them with ten, so the appointed time of his Lord was forty nights;
and Moses said to his brother Aaron, 'Be my successor among my people, and put things right, and do not follow the way of the workers of corruption.'
143 *And when Moses came to Our appointed time and his Lord spoke with him,*
he said, 'Oh my Lord, show me, that I may behold Thee!'
Said He, 'Thou shalt not see Me; but behold the mountain –
if it stays fast in its place, then thou shalt see Me.'
And when his Lord revealed Him to the mountain He made it crumble to dust;
and Moses fell down swooning. So when he awoke, he said,
'Glory be to Thee! I repent to Thee; I am the first of the believers.'
144 *Said He, 'Moses, I have chosen thee above all men*
for My Messages and My Utterance;
take what I have given thee, and be of the thankful.'
145a *And We wrote for him on the Tablets of everything an admonition,*
b *and a distinguishing of everything:*
c *'So take it forcefully, and command thy people to take the fairest of it.*
d *I shall show you the habitation of the ungodly.*
146a *I shall turn from My signs those who wax proud in the earth unjustly;*
b *though they see every sign, they will not believe in it,*
c *and though they see the way of rectitude they will not take it for a way,*
d *and though they see the way of error, they will take it for a way.*
e *That, because they have cried lies to Our signs and heeded them not.'*
147a *Those who cry lies to Our signs, and the encounter in the world to come – their works have failed;*
b *shall they be recompensed, except according to the things they have done?*
148 *And the people of Moses took to them, after him, of their ornaments a Calf – a mere body that lowed.*
Did they not see it spoke not to them, neither guided them upon any way?
Yet they took it to them, and were evildoers.

149 *And when they smote their hands, and saw that they had gone astray, they said,*
'If our Lord has not mercy on us, and forgives us not, surely we shall be of the lost.'
150 *And when Moses returned to his people, angry and sorrowful, he said,*
'Evilly have you done in my place, after me;
what, have you outstripped your Lord's commandment?'
And he cast down the Tablets, and laid hold of his brother's head,
dragging him to him. He said, 'Son of my mother,
surely the people have abased me, and well nigh slain me.
Make not my enemies to gloat over me, and put me not among the people of the evildoers.'
151 *He said, 'O my Lord, forgive me and my brother*
and enter us into Thy mercy; Thou art the most merciful of the merciful.'
152a *'Surely those who took to themselves the Calf – anger shall overtake them from their Lord, and abasement*
b *in this present life; so We recompense those who are forgers.*
153a *And those who do evil deeds, then repent thereafter and believe,*
b *surely thereafter thy Lord is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.'*
154 *And when Moses' anger abated in him, he took the Tablets*
and in the inscription of them was guidance, and mercy
unto all those who hold their Lord in awe.
155a *And Moses chose of his people seventy men for Our appointed time;*
b *and when the earthquake seized them, he said, 'My Lord, hadst Thou willed Thou*
c *wouldst have destroyed them before, and me.*
d *Wilt Thou destroy us for what the foolish ones of us have done?*
e *It is only Thy trial, whereby Thou leadest astray whom Thou wilt,*
f *and guidest whom Thou wilt. Thou art our Protector;*
g *so forgive us, and have mercy on us, for Thou art the best of forgivers.*
156a *And prescribe for us in this world good, and in the world to come; we have repented unto Thee.'*
b *Said He, 'My chastisement – I smite with it whom I will;*
c *and My mercy embraces all things, and I shall prescribe it for those who are godfearing*
d *and pay the alms, and those who indeed believe in Our signs,*
157a *those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet of the common folk,*
b *whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel,*
c *bidding them to honour, and forbidding them dishonour,*

d *making lawful for them the good things and making unlawful for them the corrupt things,*
e *and relieving them of their loads, and the fetters that were upon them.*
f *Those who believe in him and succour him and help him,*
g *and follow the light that has been sent down with him – they are the prosperers.'*

This story begins with a prologue focusing on Moses' encounter with God on the mountain (see Exodus 24:12–32:15). Moses' desire to see God is declined and proven absurd by the devastating impact God's appearance has on natural elements as mighty as a mountain. Yet, the story is not only more comprehensive than the previous account, in that it gives full attention to both the first and second givings of the tablets, its mood, too, is different. Whereas there was perfect harmony between Moses and God in the first version, in this text there is dissent: Moses' desire to see God meets with disapproval and has to be redeemed by an act of repentance (*tubtu ilayka*, Q. 7:143). Further potential for conflict arises from the shift of the responsibility for making the calf from al-Sāmirī (who no longer figures in this version) to the people themselves (Q. 7:149–150) and, to some degree, to Aaron (Q. 7:151) who was Moses' representative. The main strain of the story thus fits with the late Meccan model of storytelling which focuses on the trials of the prophetic experience.

There is, however, a further layer of confrontation, which, similar to that observed in the addition to *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, manifests itself in references to divine wrath and mercy as well as human repentance. From a narrative viewpoint, these references appear as interruptions that translate the situation of the historical story into the time of the Prophet's recitation. It is not, however, the time of the early recitation in Mecca, but that of its later re-performances in Medina. The first such shift from narrative time into the time of the listeners occurs in Q. 7:145–7 where the divine voice – first resuming the giving of the tablets to Moses (Q. 7:145a–b) and admonishing Muhammad to implement the *fairest* (Q. 7:145c) of Moses' message – abruptly turns the focus to the foes of the message among the contemporaries of Muhammad (Q. 7:145d–7), announcing to them punishment in the hereafter.

The original Meccan story is resumed in Q. 7:148–151, which relates the incident of the veneration of the calf. It is once more interrupted by a prophecy of punishment for those who are unrepentant in Q. 7:152–3, again, a later addition.[17] For them, not only is divine wrath predicted but there is also a promise of mercy. That this is addressed to the Medinan Jews becomes clear from the designation *those who took to themselves the Calf* (*muftirūn*, Q. 7:152a), an attribute applied elsewhere to the Jews as well. It looks as if those

who *repent thereafter and believe* (Q. 7:153a) was meant to denote those Medinan Jews who came close to accepting the new belief. Also part of this addition are the exegetical annexes to the story in the two concluding verses Q. 7:156–7.

Whereas the original narrative – consisting of Q. 7:142–4, 148–51 and 154 – ends with Moses accepting the second set of tablets and his prayer for divine mercy (Q. 7:155f), the extended version addressed to the extended public consisting of both the believers and the still sceptical Jewish listeners, seems to end with the Jews being invited to join the new religious movement (Q. 7:157).

A few brief explanations concerning the assumed additions may be in order. In the case of Q. 7:145–7, it is difficult to determine exactly where the addition begins. Q. 7:145c would appear to be addressed to Moses, but it could equally refer to Muhammad, to whom the following prophecy regarding the punishment of the non-repentant (Q. 7:146) – which refers to the contemporary Jews – is addressed. Things are easier with Q. 7:152–3; these verses are clearly not the words of Moses, and, from a narrative perspective, seem to delay the account. They relate that the idolaters have met with divine wrath and have been punished, yet they make it known that the invitation to repent is still open, and that mercy is promised to the repenters. The third verse group, Q. 7:155g–7, again, is problematic. The last phrases of Q. 7:155, *so forgive us, and have mercy on us, for Thou art the best of forgivers* (*anta waliyyunā fa-ghfir lanā wa'rḥamnā wa anta khayru'l-ghāfirīn*),[18] which already introduce the discourse of guilt and forgiveness, would be an adequate ending to the story. The continuation is a prayer, which begins: *And prescribe for us in this world good, and in the world to come; we have repented unto Thee* (*wa'ktub lanā fi hādhihi'l-dunyā ḥasanatan wa fi'l-ākhirati innā hudnā ilayka*, Q. 7:156a), which could be imagined to be uttered by Moses. If, however, we follow Bell's translation of *innā hudnā ilayka* as 'we have judaized towards thee' ('we have come to you as Jews'),[19] instead of Arberry's 'we have repented unto Thee', it might then be understood as a prayer proposed for utterance by the Medinan Jews. God responds that He reserves the right to punish whomever He wishes, yet He will be merciful to those believers who give alms and accept His signs. These two qualifications evidently indicate a reference to those listening to the Prophet's message; in this context (in view of *hudnā* in Q. 7:156a), they should be assumed to be Jews. Admittedly, though, it is extremely difficult to clearly separate the text as it stands (particularly concerning Q. 7:155g–6) into those units that belonged to the original narrative and those that were added in Medina. Q. 7:157, however, is doubtlessly a Medinan addition, since the designation of the messenger as *the Prophet of the common folk* (Q. 7:157a), or

'the Prophet from among the gentiles', reflects a Jewish understanding of Muhammad's status.

One could thus claim that Q. 7:152–3 and Q. 7:156–7 introduce a surplus discursive dimension into the story, very much like the additions to *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*. They focus on God's wrath (*ghaḍab*, Q. 7:152a; *'adhāb*, Q. 7:156b), God's mercy (*raḥma*, Q. 7:155g and 156c) and forgiveness (*ghufrān*, Q. 7:153b), and on human repentance (*tawba*, Q. 7:153a), thus approaching the discourse of atonement so intimately connected with the Biblical story of the golden calf in Jewish tradition. It is true that the notions of mercy and repentance do figure in the original Qur'anic story, but in Q. 7:151 they are limited to the personal sphere of Moses and thus remain marginal. In Q. 7:155g, however, they do refer to the Israelites collectively, thus making the decision of allocating that last phrase of the verse extremely difficult. It would fit perfectly into the discourse introduced by the additions since this part of Moses' prayer strikingly reflects Exodus 32:12: 'Turn from thy fierce anger and repent of the evil against Thy people' which is granted in Exodus 32:14: 'And the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people.' Equally, Q. 7:156 echoes Moses' second prayer in Exodus. 32:31–2: '[Alas], this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written'. Both Biblical verses feature prominently in the great confession prayer of the Day of Atonement. In Exodus 32:32, 'thy book' is traditionally explained as referring to the 'book of life', with reference to such texts as Psalms 69:28: 'Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous' and Psalms 139:16: 'and in thy book all my members are written'.[20] The desire to be recorded in the book of life is expressed a number of times on the Day of Atonement; it is pronounced frequently in the particular formula added to the greetings during the atonement week; it is also present in the Medinan addition to our narrative.

The insertions, Q. 7:152–3 and Q. 7:156–7, then, obviously belong to a Medinan context in which the discourse of atonement, enshrined in the notions of wrath/mercy and repentance, would have been present in the Jewish–(proto-)Muslim interaction.[21] Although there is no direct address to the Medinan Jews in these verses, in view of the unambiguous appeal to them in Q. 7:157f–g which promises them divine mercy if they follow the Prophet, it is very probable that verses Q. 7:152–3 and 156 are also addressed to that group in particular. It hardly needs to be mentioned that the notion of unpredictable divine wrath and mercy in Q. 7:152–3 and the penitential attitude in Q. 7:156 again recall the Biblical verse on God's thirteen attributes (Exodus 34:6–7) that we already encountered in the additions to the earlier account of *Sūrat Ṭā*

Hā. The narrative of the golden calf in this text has undergone another revision or, perhaps more accurately, a rewriting, integrating the discourse of atonement which in the original Meccan story did not yet matter.

The Story of the Golden Calf in Medinan Suras

The experience of ritual

The Medinan insertions in the two Meccan texts already alerted us to the new discourse of wrath, mercy and repentance. It is noteworthy that this discourse did not enter the consciousness of the community primarily through particular scriptural texts but, if we follow the testimony of Islamic tradition, through a complex ritual performance. An exegetical tradition, ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās,[22] establishes a scenario which lends itself as a heuristic basis to our argument, since it facilitates the understanding of an otherwise erratic block of Qur'anic texts about wrath, mercy and repentance that, again, refer to a seemingly disconnected group of Biblical and Talmudic texts. It is only when the diverse texts are identified as belonging to one particular ritual performance – namely the rites of the Jewish fast of the Day of Atonement – that the Qur'anic references become evident as reflections of a particular discourse.

Some reports in Islamic tradition hold that it was the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and repentance dated on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar,[23] Tishri, that coincided with the arrival of the Meccan emigrants to Medina. Ibn ʿAbbās reports that on the arrival of the Prophet in Medina, the Medinan Jews who were celebrating the Day of Atonement (Hebrew: *yōm kippūr*; Aramaic: *ʿāsōrā*; Arabic: *ʿāshūrā'*) by observing the highly demanding rites – a fast over a period of twenty-four hours and extensive liturgical recitations[24] – caught the attention of the newly arrived immigrants. Asked about the meaning of their observance, they replied that it referred to the Israelites' deliverance from Pharaoh. This Mosaic aetiology could not but have appealed to the newcomers, who perceived themselves as continuing the Mosaic tradition.[25] Muhammad is reported to have said, 'We have a better right to Moses than they have',[26] and to have imposed the fast on his community. The first imposition of fasting on the community is reflected in Q. 2:183: *O believers, prescribed for you is the Fast, even as it was prescribed for those that were before you – haply you will be godfearing* (*yā ayyuhā'lladhīna āmanū, kutiba ʿalaykumu'l-ṣiyāmu kamā kutiba ʿalā'lladhīna min qablikum la'allakum tattaqūn*). Thus, in early Islam, the ruling of the first Islamic fast was an act of assimilation of a proto-Islamic cult into already established monotheistic practices current with the older religions.

The Mosaic reference that had so immediately appealed to the newcomers' religious consciousness is not without implications. It is true that the aetiology given by the Medinan Jews for their fast is not the exact historical one. The common Rabbinic explanation of the Day of Atonement is that it commemorates the descent of Moses from Sinai with the second set of tablets.[27] Diverse Mosaic memories, including that of the exodus, do play a role in the service of the feast, but it is the second giving of the tablets of the law to Moses in particular that is recalled numerous times. Something of this celebration is mirrored in the particular selections of Biblical reminiscences in the Qur'an. Goitein has drawn attention to the striking fact that the Qur'anic section on the Ramadan rulings (Q. 2:183–7) includes an unambiguous reference (Q. 2:186) to one of the most prominent liturgical elements of the Yom Kippur penitential litanies,[28] the so-called *selīḥōt*,[29] particular prayers that frequently start or end with the plea 'answer us', relying on Psalm 20:9: 'Save Lord: let the king hear us when we call'.[30] The Qur'anic version reads: *And when My servants question thee concerning Me – I am near to answer the call of the caller, when he calls to Me; so let them respond to Me, and let them believe in Me; haply so they will go aright* (Q. 2:186). This verse does not smoothly connect with its immediate context, but strikingly switches from addressing a group of receivers (*antum*) in the section about fasting (Q. 2:183–5, to be continued in Q. 2:187) to an address to the Prophet, who is instructed to remind the community (*ʿibād*) of the closeness and faithfulness of the divine speaker, an instruction that sounds like an indirect exhortation to utter prayers, perhaps similar to those of the Jewish service, where penitential litanies are recited. These litanies are built on the thirteen attributes, already mentioned in the context of the Medinan insertions of *Sūrat Ṭāhā* and *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*. They play a crucial role in the shaping of the ritual of the Day of Atonement, where they are recited on multiple occasions.

Jewish tradition had, from early on, interpreted the event of Moses' receiving this revelation as a divine instruction to Moses about how to perform the penitential prayer: 'God showed Moses the order of prayer. He said to him, whenever Israel sins, let them perform this rite before Me and I shall forgive them ... there is a covenant that the Thirteen Attributes do not return unanswered.'[31] This Talmudic conception explains how the thirteen attributes became the nucleus of all the prayers for atonement, so that they serve to this day as a refrain constantly repeated in all the penitential liturgies.[32] The Qur'anic verse Q. 2:186, which paraphrases two of the thirteen attributes, thus, viewed from this intertextual perspective, refers to the very heart of the atonement liturgy.[33]

Medinan narrative fragments of the story of the golden calf: Q. 2:51–4, 92–3

Looking at the Medinan texts, we find no more than a few somewhat unconnected verses referring to the golden calf, located again in *Sūrat al-Baqara*. This is easily explained: since the episode related in the two Meccan suras had been updated to fit the Medinan social context – which seems to have included, for the first two years after the *hijra*, a Jewish presence[34] – there was no need to retell the story in detail. Obviously, both the version of *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* and *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* continued to be used in liturgical practice. It is noteworthy that a new perspective regarding Biblical memory had emerged: Biblical accounts were no longer exclusively reminders addressed to the early community, but perceived as being at the same time the heritage of a particular group existing in the community's own living space. The resulting necessity of their negotiation had a strong impact on Qur'anic narrative in Medina, where rewritings of earlier stories abound.[35]

There is, however, one short version of the story of the golden calf and an even shorter reminiscence of it in a Medinan text. In trying to evaluate these texts we face some difficulties, since they are embedded in a long and complex sura whose individual sections are largely unrelated to each other and thus do not allow for a secure chronological classification. The short fragmentary sections, Q. 2:51–4 and Q. 2:92–3,[36] are part of an extensive recapitulation (Q. 2:40–122) of Israelite history framed in addresses to the heirs of that tradition, the Medinan Jews, referred to as Banū Isrāʾīl. The long sequence is introduced by an invocation calling on the Banū Isrāʾīl to be true to their privileged rank: Q. 2:40: *Children of Israel, remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and fulfil My covenant and I shall fulfil your covenant; and have awe of Me* (*Yā banī Isrāʾīlaʾdhkurū niʿmatiyaʾllatī anʿamtu ʿalaykum wa ūfū bi-ʿahdī ūfi bi-ʿahdikum wa iyyāya fa-rhabūn*). Although grave allegations are raised against the Jews, the section is concluded by a similarly conciliatory address in Q. 2:122: *Children of Israel, remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and that I have preferred you above all beings* (*Yā banī Isrāʾīlaʾdhkurū niʿmatiyaʾllatī anʿamtu ʿalaykum wa annī faḍḍaltukum ʿalāʾl-ʿālamīn*).

The evocation of the account of the golden calf in this text is part of a long catalogue of unconnected historical reminders that enumerates, in a roughly historical sequence, the divine acts of salvation and contrasts them with the ungrateful behaviour of the people. The text has been understood as an invective against the Medinan Jews by Busse.[37] It should, however, be noted that the text, in its reproachful tone and its somewhat mechanical narrative

form of juxtaposing unconnected divine deeds and morally deficient human reactions, strongly echoes the likewise reproachful and catalogue-like Psalms 106.[38] Whereas the psalm concludes with a hope-inspiring prayer, the lengthy address to the Jews culminates in an expression of despair which compares the hearts of the addressees to stone:

Q. 2:47–54:

47 *Children of Israel, remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you,*
and that I have preferred you above all beings;
48 *and beware of a day when no soul for another shall give satisfaction,*
and no intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any counterpoise be taken, neither shall they be helped.
49 *And when We delivered you from the folk of Pharaoh*
who were visiting you with evil chastisement, slaughtering your sons, and sparing your women;
and in that was a grievous trial from your Lord.
50 *And when We divided for you the sea and delivered you,*
and drowned Pharaoh's folk while you were beholding.
51 *And when We appointed with Moses forty nights*
then you took to yourselves the Calf after him and you were evildoers;
52 *then We pardoned you after that, that haply you should be thankful.*
53 *And when We gave to Moses the* [*Scripture*] *and the Salvation,*
that haply you should be guided.
54 *And when Moses said to his people, 'My people, you have done wrong against yourselves by your taking the Calf; now turn to your Creator and slay one another.*
That will be better for you in your Creator's sight, and He will turn to you; truly He turns, and is All-compassionate.'

The episode of the worshipping of the golden calf with its dire consequences (Q. 2:51–2, 54) – though only one of a number of grave sins blamed on the Banū Isrāʾīl – stands out, in this catalogue of events, because of its uniquely close connection to the idea of atonement. It ends with a disturbing injunction given by Moses to the Israelites to slay their own kin (*uqtulū anfusakum*, Q. 2:54) which appears to be a reference to the order given by Moses to the sons of Levi to 'slay every man his brother, every man his companion and every man his neighbour' (Exodus 32:27). The words attributed to Moses in the Qur'an, which impose an extremely severe form of atonement, may, as Hawting has proposed, also reflect Leviticus 16:29, which is understood as the divine ordinance for the Day of Atonement in Judaism: 'afflict your souls' (*teʿannū*

et nafshōtekhem), an enjoinment that may have been translated etymologically into Arabic where the root *ṭ'n* means not 'to afflict' but 'to stab'.[39] In that case, the Qur'anic promise of mercy in Q. 2:54: *now turn to your Creator and slay one another. That will be better for you in your Creator's sight, and He will turn to you; truly He turns, and is All-compassionate* would reflect that in Leviticus 16:29–30: 'in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all . . . For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.' There is a further reminiscence later in the address to the Banū Isrā'īl which sounds more polemical:

Q. 2:92–3:

92 *And Moses came to you with the clear signs,*
then you took to yourselves the Calf after him and you were evildoers.
93 *And when We took compact with you, and raised over you the Mount:*
'Take forcefully what We have given you and give ear.' They said, 'We hear, and rebel';
and they were made to drink the Calf in their hearts for their unbelief.
Say: 'Evil is the thing your faith bids you to, if you are believers.'

Although the image of the Israelites drinking the calf in their hearts (Q. 2:93) may simply relate to Exodus 32:20 (which talks about the destruction of the calf and the scattering of its ashes in water, which is subsequently drunk by the Israelites), it may also be read metaphorically – as it was in some commentaries[40] – thus implying that they were made to imbibe the love of the calf. Still, the story is not used, as Hawting has justly stressed,[41] to represent a pattern of behaviour of the Jews in the way it occurs in some Christian polemic against Judaism.[42]

Historical and Methodological Conclusions

Hawting has characterised the scholarly perspective that usually informs investigations into the Qur'anic material in relation to the Biblical and post-Biblical material:

> Most non-Muslim scholars have assumed that the Qur'ānic allusions to a [Biblical] story depend ultimately on the biblical account and are to be understood as drawing on and developing the interpretations and embellishments which had arisen about the biblical narrative in subsequent Jewish and Christian reworkings of it. In other words, the Qur'ānic material has been itself understood as part of the midrashic tradition.[43]

In view of the unambiguously oral character of the Qur'anic text, I would not limit the scope of the investigation to the aspect of reworkings and developments of earlier interpretations. Such a hypothesis, that seems to imply a tacit application of the Jewish Mishnaic development in the Qur'an, would raise a number of questions, not least about the Qur'anic counterpart of the Jewish Rabbinic school (*bēt midrash*). Apart from the lack of transparency – the assumption of the Qur'an's secondary origin is nowhere made explicit in Hawting's presentation – the hypothesis appears overzealous, since it fundamentally changes the image of the Qur'an, shifting its literary genre from oral, prophetic-parenetic speech to learned exegetical reworking, thus reducing its oral communication to a mere simulation of that process.

The Qur'anic reception of the Biblical story of the golden calf, in my view, instead points to another development. Rather than a literary reworking of the Biblical story, the Qur'anic texts obviously display an involvement of the community in an extended argument with the group of Jewish learned in Medina that must have been going on at the time the texts were pronounced. The argument was clad in direct addresses to the Medinan Jews (additions to *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* and *Sūrat al-A'rāf*) or in more indirect appeals to that group (*Sūrat al-Baqara*). This type of speech is alien to Midrashic literature.

It is, of course, true that a florilegium of Biblical and post-Biblical texts partake in the discourse of atonement and are contextualised in the Qur'an in new ways. The integration of these atonement-related texts into the Qur'an, however, relies less on textual re-readings than on debate. It does not have purely textual consequences either, but carries important political implications: the references first provide an aetiology for the new institution of Muslim fasting (Q. 2:183–7) as a reminder of God's readiness to answer prayers during that ascetic period – an argument based on experiences related to liturgy. At a later stage they become part of exhortations directly (Q. 20:80–82) or indirectly (Q. 4:145, 152–3, 155–7) addressed to the Medinan Jews to seek divine mercy (Q. 7:152–3, Q. 2:47–54) by joining the ranks of the new Muslim community (Q. 7:155–7). These admonitions are taken so seriously that they are not only communicated again in new Qur'anic texts emerging in Medina, but also secondarily introduced into all the earlier – Meccan – texts that bear a relation to the story of the golden calf, that mythic incident which had become the *locus classicus* on human guilt.

Only a diachronic reading – its unavoidable circular argument admitted – is apt to shed light on the process of the Qur'an's rewriting of itself. Viewed at its pre-redactional stage of development (i.e. during the process of emergence itself), the Qur'an mirrors a process of both debating scriptural materials and of politically significant social interaction. The observation of this process,

that finally results in the emergence of both a scripture and a community, lies beyond the scope of the post-redactional, synchronic reading that is generally advocated by contemporary scholarship.

A number of problems remain unsolved after this short survey of the story of the golden calf. One question that arises is why – in view of the Muslim community's awareness of the significance of acts in which a community collectively seeks forgiveness – no liturgically prominent rite of atonement has emerged in Sunni Islam. There is no decisive answer to this. It is obvious that the Qur'anic assimilation of the Jewish ritual of atonement has remained limited in scope. The central performance in the Jewish service of the feast, the communal confession of sins, seems not to have been introduced into the Islamic horizon with the acceptance of the 'Āshūrā' fast. As Hawting has observed, 'there seems to be no idea of a general act of atonement for guilt which is shared by the whole community or the whole of mankind as exists in Judaism and Christianity'.[44] Although a genuine ceremony devoted principally to communal confession may be missing in Sunni Islam – as is a fixed form of individual confession, such as that which Christianity has cherished over the ages and which, in modern times, has become translated into new kinds of secular self-inquiring[45] – there does exist a liturgical space for communal supplication and the asking of forgiveness in the ceremonies held on *laylat al-qadr*, the night of the twenty-seventh of Ramadan. It is true that the fast of 'Āshūrā' was never completely abolished but retained as a voluntary fast day in Sunni Islam,[46] occurring on the date that matches the tenth of Tishri, the date of the Day of Atonement, in the Jewish calendar: the tenth of Muḥarram. However, it was in the Shi'i tradition that 'Āshūrā' in the course of time recovered its original character as a ceremony of collective repentance and atonement. The tenth of Muḥarram is the most prominent festival in Shi'i Islam, a day of commemoration of the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, in Karbala in 61/680. As Hawting has shown,[47] the proto-Shi'i group of the *tawwābūn* (penitents), who in 65/685 revolted against the Umayyads to expunge their guilt for Ḥusayn's murder and met their deaths in battle at Ra's al-'Ayn in Iraq, believed that the Israelites in some way had given up their lives to atone for having worshipped the calf. In view of the prominence of atonement and expiation in their thinking, it is possible that they themselves were under the spell of the solemn atmosphere of the original Day of Atonement when sacrificing themselves.

NOTES

1 The problem has been discussed in Neuwirth, 'Qur'an and History'.
2 Assmann and Assmann, 'Kanon and Zensur', p. 26.

3 Dohmen and Oehming, *Biblischer Kanon*. Both approaches to the Qur'an have been applied by the present author in an attempt to gain an overview over the Qur'anic development; see chapter 5, 'Recitation'.
4 This relationship is studied by Agnes Imhof, *Religiöser Wandel und die Genese des Islam: Das Menschenbild altarabischer Panegyriker im 7. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg, 2004).
5 To assume the historicity of the Qur'anic testimonies is, of course, a controversial step. Thus, Uri Rubin ('Jews and Judaism', *EQ*, vol. III, pp. 21–34) refrains from any attempt at classifying the Qur'anic statements concerning the Jews chronologically. In view of the new insights into the historical interaction between the Jews of Medina and the emerging community provided by the studies of Meir Jacob Kister ('"Do not assimilate yourselves . . .", *Lā tashabbahū*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 12 [1989], pp. 321–71) and Michael Lecker (*Muslims, Jews and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina* [Leiden, 1995]), for example, such a stance that would allow the researcher to dispense with a close reading of the Qur'an in order to glean traces of interaction between the two communities seems overcautious.
6 The accepted appellation 'the golden calf' is used here although the object of worship is simply called a 'calf' in both Exodus 32 and the Qur'anic narratives; see Gerald Hawting, 'Calf of Gold', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 272–6. The reception of the Qur'anic narrative has been pursued in a most stimulating way by Michael E. Pregill, 'Methodologies for the Dating of Exegetical Works and Traditions: Can the Lost *Tafsīr* of Kalbī be Recovered from *Tafsīr Ibn'Abbās* (also known as *al-Wāḍiḥ*)?' in Karen Bauer, ed., *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis (2nd/8th – 9th/15th c.)* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 393–453.
7 A reading of the Qur'an as a text that drew upon the cultures of the Ancient Near East has been called for by Rippin as early as 1983; see Rippin, 'The Qur'an as Literature'. The intention here, however, differs from his expectations. We will try to sound out the interactions that took place between the early Islamic community and the representatives of other monotheistic religions. An earlier attempt of this kind focused on *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* whose extraordinary significance as a uniquely antiphonic sura particularly apt for liturgical use can best be understood with reference to the equally extraordinary liturgical significance of Psalms 136 in Judaism; see Neuwirth, 'Qur'ānic Literary Structure Revisited' and chapter 3, 'Glimpses'.
8 Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), pp. 192–213.
9 Gerald R. Hawting, 'The Tawwābūn, Atonement and the 'Āshūrā', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1995), pp. 166–81.
10 It is related in the narratives of Moses found in Q. 79:15–26 (early Meccan); Q. 37:114–22, Q. 20:10–99, Q. 26:10–67 (middle Meccan); Q. 40:23–55, Q. 28:1–46, Q. 10:75–93 and Q. 7:103–56 (late Meccan). These stories, with the exception of Q. 7:103–56 and Q. 2:54–61 have been discussed in chapter 10, 'Narrative'.
11 For the exegetical comments on certain obscure details of the story, see Hawting, 'Calf of Gold'.
12 For the background to the introduction of this figure, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 329–33.
13 *Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Isidore Epstein, 35 vols (London, Soncino Press, 1935–1952; repr. in 18 vols, 1961; Hebrew–English edn., 29 vols, 1960–1989), Sanhedrin 102a.
14 This addition is not marked as such in Islamic tradition; it is therefore missing from the list compiled by Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe*.
15 The complicated way in which later additions are inserted into the text seems to suggest parts of the text may have existed in written form. Madigan (*The Qur'ān's Self-Image*), who has lucidly argued for the non-existence of a complete copy before the official redaction, admits the probability of partial written texts. The consideration of the phenomenon of later additions within his argument could have allowed for more definite conclusions.

16 The story of the golden calf in this sura is difficult to allocate chronologically. Although Witztum (in an unpublished typescript) tends to date *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* even before *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* on the basis of intertextual observations, in view of its literary shape (see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 294–5), we will keep to its conventional placement as a late Meccan text. Yet, there remain unsolved questions, since the multiple additions and perhaps reworkings of the are the story sometimes make it hard to discern the Meccan and the Medinan share.

17 To facilitate their discussion, these verses have been subdivided into their single elements. The additions are, again, not listed among the Medinan additions collected by Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe*.

18 Compare with Exodus 32:14.

19 Bell (*Qur'ān*, I, p. 152) and Paret (*Der Koran: Übersetzung* [Stuttgart, 1980]) assume a word play here: '*alladhīna hādū*' in the Qur'an is a frequently used circumlocution of *al-yahūd*, the Jews.

20 See Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot (Exodus)* (Jerusalem, 1978), II, pp. 558–95.

21 In terms of semantics, Q. 7:155g would fit there as well if we assume that it was formally adapted to fit the Moses prayer.

22 Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk li-Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed., Michael J. de Goeje *et al.* (Leiden, 1879–1901), III, p. 1281; translated into English as *The History: An Annotated Translation*, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany, NY, 1987–1998), VII, p. 26; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Kitāb al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed., Muḥammad Shīnī (Istanbul, 1329/1912), III, pp 149–50.

23 Leviticus 16:29–30.

24 Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, pp. 124–30; see also Kees Wagtendonk, 'Fasting', *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 180–84.

25 See chapter 10, 'Narrative'.

26 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III, p. 1281; idem, *The History*, VII, p. 26; Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, III, pp. 149–50.

27 The Day of Atonement is imposed through a divine ruling; see Leviticus 16:29–30.

28 Goitein, *Ramadan*, pp. 90–110. It is obvious, and underscored by Goitein, that the injunction of fasting developed from a shorter period of abstention to the ultimate fast over thirty days which, according to Wagtendonk (*Fasting in the Koran*), seems to have been ordained only after the Battle of Badr. Q. 2:186, which seems to reflect the liturgical genre of the Jewish *selīḥōt*, may well pertain to the imposition of the initial, short period of fasting.

29 Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, pp. 180–82.

30 For a comparison, see the Arabic Bible translation (*al-Kitāb al-muqaddas*): *li-yastajib lanāʾl-maliku fī yawmi duʿāʾinā*.

31 *Babylonian Talmūd*, Rosh Hashana 17b.

32 Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, pp. 177–80.

33 It is noteworthy that in the Sufi exegesis of Q. 2:186, the aspect of the divine attributes is further elaborated, e.g., Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ziyādat Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, ed. Gerhard Böwering (Beirut, 1986), p. 16.

34 The presence of Jewish listeners is suggested by texts that contain quotations of, or references very similar to, Jewish liturgical texts, such as *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*; see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 761–5.

35 The Medinan additions, as far as Islamic tradition itself has marked them as such, have been discussed by Nagel (*Medinensische Einschübe*, pp. 59–68). Unfortunately, the cases discussed in Nagel's study were not identified through analytical study, but were taken from Islamic tradition. Thus, they do not reflect more than a small – and, moreover, highly questionable – fraction of the existing instances, many of which have been recognised by critical scholars from early on, for example, by Nöldeke. The entire problem deserves closer investigation, and due attention should also be paid to the aspect of the changing memory which is debated in the Qur'an.

36 It is again alluded to in Q. 4:153: *The People of the* [Scripture] *will ask thee to bring down upon them a Book from heaven; and they asked Moses for greater than that, for they said, 'Show us God openly.' And the thunderbolt took them for their evildoing. Then they took to themselves the Calf, after the clear signs had come to them; yet We pardoned them that, and We bestowed upon Moses a clear authority* (*Yasʾaluka ahluʾl-kitābi an tunazzila ʿalayhim kitāban minaʾl-samāʾi fa-qad saʾalū Mūsā akbara min dhālika fa-qālū arināʾllāha jahratan fa-akhadhathumuʾl-ṣāʿiqatu bi-ẓulmihim thummaʾttakhadhūʾl-ʿijla min baʿdi mā jāʾathumuʾl-bayyinātu fa-ʿafawnā ʿan dhālika wa ataynā Mūsā sulṭānan mubīnan*).

37 Busse, *Theologische Beziehungen*, pp. 43–51.

38 The psalm, however, relates the events in the first person plural (the 'we' voice) whereas the Qur'anic text relates it as an address to a group spoken to as 'you'.

39 Hawting, 'Calf of Gold', p. 276.

40 Ibid., p. 274.

41 Ibid., p. 274.

42 See the speech of Stephen in Acts 7.

43 Hawting, 'Calf of Gold', p. 275.

44 Hawting, 'The Tawwābūn', p. 170. He continues: 'This seems consonant with the generally limited concept of atonement, kaffāra, in Islam. Kaffārāt are demanded for certain specific offences such as the breaking of oaths or the failure to perform the required rituals in a proper way'. See also Gerald R. Hawting, 'Atonement', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 166–88.

45 Alois Hahn, 'Zur Soziologie der Beichte und anderer Formen institutionalisierter Bekenntnisse: Selbstthematisierung und Zivilisationsprozess', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 3 (1982), pp. 407–34.

46 Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, II, pp. 147–9.

47 Hawting, 'The Tawwābūn', p. 168.

12

Imagining Mary, Disputing Jesus: Reading *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) and Related Meccan Texts in the Context of the Qur'anic Communication Process*

Introduction

It is striking to observe that although Christian tradition had a major impact on nascent Islam,[1] Jesus (ʿĪsā) seems at first sight to not be a particularly prominent figure in the Qur'an. He makes his first appearance through the story of his mother, Mary, and is from then on, more often than not, referred to through her; accordingly, the Qur'anic Jesus bears not a patronymic but the matronymic ʿĪsā b. Maryam. His life story is not consistently presented: accounts about him are dispersed over diverse texts, both Meccan and Medinan,[2] and never crystallise to form a memorable vita made up of distinguishable phases as do the Qur'anic accounts of other prophets,[3] particularly Moses.[4] The story of Mary in the Qur'an is extraordinary from another point of view: it focuses on the annunciation of her motherhood and her giving birth to Jesus. In the later Medinan version, the focus is even placed on her own birth, thus essentially limiting her to her female gender role as the mother of a prophet. Whereas her ritual and sexual purity is repeatedly emphasised, she is hardly granted any meaningful interaction with other (human) protagonists. An understanding of the Qur'anic texts about Mary and Jesus, and their respective functions is therefore somewhat elusive. What did Mary and Jesus mean to the early Muslim community?

The texts remain obscure as long as they are considered mere fragments of Christian canonical and/or apocryphal traditions that need to be

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Imagining Mary – Disputing Jesus: Reading *Sūrat Maryam* and Related Meccan Texts within the Qur'ānic Communication Process', in Benjamin Jokisch, Ulrich Rebstock and Lawrence I. Conrad, eds., *Fremde, Feinde und Kurioses: Innen- und Aussenansichten unseres muslimischen Nachbarn* (Berlin, de Gruyter 2009), pp. 383–416. Reprinted by kind permission of the publisher.

complemented by data from the 'original' Christian texts.[5] Although identifying extra-Qur'anic traditions is certainly an indispensable step in Qur'anic scholarship, it should not be expected to result in more than a delineation of the range of traditions current among the contemporaries of the early community, certainly not in the discovery of 'sources' of the Qur'an.[6] The oversimplified image of the Prophet – who was held in the past by Western scholars to be the author of the Qur'an, and was alleged to have selected and integrated particular materials from the various monotheistic traditions into his text to communicate them to pagan listeners – has by now given way to a more open perception. Wansbrough and his school have justly maintained that it was not only Islam but the Qur'an itself that must have emerged from a sectarian milieu.[7] Though the final conclusions drawn by Wansbrough are flawed,[8] his approach did serve to alert us to the polemic–apologetic framework of the Qur'anic communications,[9] and to the view that the Qur'an should be understood as an engaged re-reading of a range of earlier traditions. This observation neither excludes nor even contradicts the fact that both the Qur'anic corpus and the early community developed synchronously and interactively in Mecca, and later in Medina. Considering the Qur'an as a document of that crucial sociopolitical process, the present chapter relocates the focus from the notion of a text authored solely by the Prophet (or later compilers) to the communication process itself. To explore the community's possible religious background and to understand their debates, extra-Qur'anic traditions of Late Antiquity have to be considered in the investigation.

To approach Qur'anic texts primarily through extra-Qur'anic material would, however, fail to do justice to their intra-Qur'anic referentiality and obscure the *Sitz im Leben* of individual communications. The focus needs to lie on the final shape of the Qur'an. Neglecting the intra-Qur'anic context due to the dismissal of Qur'anic chronology gravely impairs even the most substantial contributions to the topic. Even thorough studies such as Busse's *Die theologischen Beziehungen* and Martin Bauschke's *Jesus im Koran* ignore the development of the community's attitudes towards Christian tradition during Muhammad's ministry. Both authors indiscriminately refer to Muhammad as an author who collates texts from various traditions and as a leader of a community who debates orally with contemporaries, thus conflating two mutually exclusive literary discourses. Neal Robinson's *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, though respecting chronology, is more interested in a dogmatic comparison between Christianity and Islam, and thus refrains from a microstructural reading of the Qur'anic communication process.

However, it has to be considered that before the redaction of the Qur'an (when the suras were integrated into the text corpus and arranged without

regard for chronology), the texts were communicated to the early listeners in response to particular discourses that the community was engaging in; later communications (often being commentaries on earlier ones) can thus be presupposed to encapsulate those earlier debates. It is only through careful consideration of these intra-Qur'anic contexts that the multilayered structure of the Qur'anic text comes to the fore. This is a step that is overleapt by the scholars of the Wansbrough school, who start out by stripping the Qur'anic text of its temporal and cultural coordinates, thus rashly projecting it into the realm of literary myth with no clues as to its historical positioning. In view of recent findings, both in terms of manuscript and philological-historical evidence,[10] a later dating of the Qur'an such as proposed by Wansbrough cannot be upheld, and the opinion that the Qur'an emerged from another cultural area and not the Hijaz (defended by the Wansbrough school) is becoming obsolete. Furthermore, literary evidence (based on the form and style of the Qur'an), which remains excluded from revisionist historical scholarship, strongly argues in favour of the Qur'an's genesis from an oral communication process involving the interaction between the historical figure of a proclaimer and his listeners.[11] This chapter attempts to re-read the Qur'anic texts about Mary and Jesus as a chain of successive developments in the process of the Qur'an's communication to the early listeners, whose expectations and religious background are reflected in the Qur'anic texts. This reading also takes extra-Qur'anic traditions into consideration, thus allowing us in the end to draw conclusions about the Meccan community's views on Mary and Jesus, and thus Christianity itself.[12]

The earliest instance of Mary's appearance in the Qur'an is found in *Sūrat Maryam*. To locate this text within the Qur'an we have to take into account the fact that the sura is marked by the use of a particular divine name, *al-raḥmān*, and thus forms part of an ensemble of suras known in Qur'anic scholarship as the '*raḥmān* suras'.[13] This group is limited to seven suras that, for formal and stylistic reasons, are conventionally ascribed to the middle Meccan phase of Muhammad's activities.[14] The use of the divine name *al-raḥmān* later disappears from the Qur'anic texts, not to be used again, though it remains present through its use in the *basmala* formula. Although the common features of the '*raḥmān* suras' have not been studied systematically, it is obvious that *Sūrat Maryam* is closely related to two other *raḥmān* suras which discuss similar and occasionally identical topics, though only containing reminiscences of Mary's or Jesus' story: *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (Q. 43) and *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'*. A synopsis of the polemic against the belief in God as a 'father' that is put forward in these three suras will help to clarify the context in which the figure of Jesus entered the Qur'anic communications addressed to the Meccan

listeners. Whereas there are no further stories about Mary and Jesus in Meccan texts, both figures receive new attention in the Medinan period, where a long sura, *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, is partly dedicated to them.[15] This text, which does not confine itself to Mary miraculously conceiving and giving birth to Jesus, but also covers her own birth and childhood as well as some events from the adult life of Jesus, reveals traces of an intense theological exchange with Christian believers, without, however, displaying any polemical attitude towards particular Christian dogmas.[16] Such polemic occurs only in still later reminiscences, particularly in *Sūrat al-Nisā'*.[17] This chapter will first discuss the stories in *Sūrat Maryam* and locate them in their discursive context, briefly comparing the polemics of that sura to that of *Sūrat al-Zukhruf*. It will then draw conclusions concerning the community to which the Meccan texts about Mary and Jesus were addressed.

Sūrat Maryam

Lower criticism: Examining the text's microstructural unity

Sūrat Maryam attests to a stage of development where the Prophet appears already fully recognised as the bearer of the Qur'anic message (Q. 19:97).[18] In terms of form, the sura displays a markedly poetical style. The verses contain two to four cola (i.e. four short phrases making up convenient speech units) which bear a particularly expressive rhyme (*-iyyā*, or *-ayyā*).[19] It is only from Q. 19:75 onwards that the sura admits other consonants than *–y* to constitute the rhyme which thus turns into the simplified pattern of *a/i/uCCā*.[20] The rhyme ending *-iyyā* is unique to *Sūrat Maryam* in the Qur'an. There are some strikingly poetic verses, such as Zachariah's self-presentation using an analytical construction and an expressive metaphor:[21] *the bones within me are feeble and my head is all aflame with hoariness* (*innī wahana'l-'aẓmu minnī wa'shta'ala'l-ra'su shayban*, Q. 19:4). There are further tropes like frequent paronomasias (e.g. Q. 19:23, 79, 83, 84) and parallelisms (Q. 19:15, 20, 30–31, 33), and a chiastic construction (Q. 19:13). All these phenomena point to a relatively early composition, as proposed by Nöldeke.[22] This impression of a particularly artistic text is blurred somehow by a section immediately following the story of Mary, Q. 19:34–40, that contains rhymes of the simple pattern of *-ūn/-īn* endings and which also strikingly diverges from the rest of the sura through its use of the divine name *Allāh* instead of *al-raḥmān*. These formal divergences raise the question of whether the section was originally part of the sura or a later addition. This question can only be answered through a comparison with related Qur'anic texts, as will be shown below.

There is one further verse (Q. 19:58) whose form raises doubts about its original position in the sura, seemingly a conclusion of the narrative sequence. It is extraordinarily lengthy, having seven cola as opposed to the average of three – five being the maximum limit for the verses in the sura.

Q. 19:58:

58 *These are they whom God has blessed*
among the Prophets of the seed of Adam,
and of those We bore with Noah,
and of the seed of Abraham and Israel,
and of those We guided and chose.
When the signs of the All-merciful are recited to them,
they [fall] down prostrate, weeping.[23]

The concept underlying the verse, that particular prophets constitute a genealogical group, is alien to the core part of *Sūrat Maryam* and is still outside the scope of Meccan prophetology. It will be fully developed only in Medinan texts where it is closely connected to the family of Mary, the House of Amram (Āl ʿImrān). The verse Q. 19:58 is best explained as a later addition inspired by *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* (Q. 3:33),[24] where a similar genealogy (Adam – Noah – the House of Abraham, though not Israel – the House of Amram) figures as the prologue to an extended story of Mary.[25] The description in Q. 19:59 (*they fall down prostrate, weeping*) seems to point to monastic practices; the group alluded to obviously represents the Christians, whose designation as Āl ʿImrān is reserved for *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*.

Analysis and comment

The stories of Zachariah and Mary (Q. 19:1–33)

Let us look first at the stories concerning Mary in *Sūrat Maryam*, a sura which is unique in beginning with a set of stories that, elsewhere, are located in the centre of the text. This start mirrors the sequence of stories of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1), where the miraculous stories of the birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus are juxtaposed at the beginning of the text. In the Qur'an, John (Yaḥyā) is named whereas Jesus remains unnamed in the story. Contrary to the narrative strategy of the Gospel, however, the Qur'anic stories that focus on a parent rather than the child do not connect to form an interrelated event. John's birth is not synchronised with that of Jesus so as to establish him as a forerunner (*prodromos*) of Jesus; it does not entail any significance for the ministry of Jesus. The two prophetic figures in the Qur'an seem unrelated to each other – contrary to the Gospel narrative where John, intuitively aware of

the overarching divine plan while still in his mother's womb, is presented as saluting the equally unborn Jesus. John, in the Qur'anic narrative, will not be encountered in a joint context with Jesus again. Their stories thus do not partake in one and the same divine salvation plan; on the contrary, such a plan implicitly becomes negated through this severing of the bond between the two stories.

John is not ascribed a lower status than Jesus, but is presented as his equal. This is highlighted through their parallel treatment; their stories are connected to each other through analogous motifs, the miraculous birth of a child and the temporary muteness of a parent. John is born to the aged Zachariah and his barren wife, Mary's son Jesus is conceived and born without a male partner involved. Zachariah, a priest serving in the temple (*miḥrāb*),[26] experiences muteness for a limited time, a handicap that he perceives as the sign of God's true intention to work the miracle announced to him – that of having a son. He commissions others to utter speech: his community shall praise God in the morning and in the evening (*Give you glory at dawn and evening, sabbiḥū bukratan wa ʿashiyyan*, Q. 19:11). Their praise of God takes the place of the hymn, which was uttered, according to Luke 1:67–79, by Zachariah himself. (It is interesting to note that, in church liturgy, that text has become part of the evening *laudes*, the Benedictus; it functions as the counterpart to the Magnificat[27] – recited in the morning *laudes*. The Qur'anic insistence on the two liturgical times for the praise to be recited by the community perhaps reflects the already established ecclesiastic tradition of using the Magnificat and the Benedictus in the morning and evening prayers.) Mary, in turn, is told to refrain from speaking, to remain mute, so as not to expose herself to violent repercussions to her scandalously having given birth out of wedlock. In her stead, her infant child will speak up. Mary's muteness is thus, like that of Zachariah's, linked to a miracle. Both stories set out from the same location: the Jerusalem temple, which is explicitly mentioned in Zachariah's case (Q. 19:11) but hidden behind an allusion in Mary's case (Q. 19:16).[28] The location of Mary in the temple (a deviation from Luke's story) presupposes a reading of the story according to the Protevangelium of James,[29] which will be made explicit only in the Medinan retelling of the story; it seems, however, to lurk behind the Meccan story as well.

The two stories end with analogous developments: the son of Zachariah and the son of Mary are destined to become prophets. They will have access to scripture and cling to it (Q. 19:12, Q. 19:30) and will show particular piety towards their parent(s) (Q. 19:14, Q. 19:32). Zachariah's son is gifted with the virtue of *ḥanān* (compassion, tenderness) a pun on his original name, Yohanan (in Hebrew) which means 'God is compassion' (Q. 19:13); a further pun may be

hidden behind the introductory formula of Zachariah's story, where *dhikr* (remembrance) may be a play on the Hebrew name Zachariah, meaning 'remembrance of God'. John will also display wisdom as a child, thereby being reminiscent of his description in Luke 1:17: 'And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' Both of the children will refrain from arrogance (Q. 19:14, Q. 19:32); both are given the obligation of *zakāt* (Q. 19:13, Q. 19:31),[30] and both will be eulogised when their names are uttered (Q. 19:15, Q. 19:33). These poetic and compositional similarities and parallels create a densely knit context that binds the two figures together in spite of the Qur'anic exclusion of a Christological teleology which views John as the forerunner of Christ from the beginning (as in Luke 1:17).

The annunciation to Zachariah (Q. 19:2–15)

Q. 19:2–15:

2 *The mention of thy Lord's mercy unto His servant Zachariah;*
3 *when he called upon his Lord secretly*
4 *saying, 'O my Lord, behold the bones within me are feeble*
and my head is all aflame with hoariness.
And in calling on Thee, my Lord, I have never been hitherto unprosperous.
5 *And now I fear my kinsfolk after I am gone; and my wife is barren.*
So give me, from Thee, a kinsman
6 *who shall be my inheritor and the inheritor of the House of Jacob;*
and make him, my Lord, well-pleasing.'
7 *'O Zachariah, We give thee good tidings of a boy, whose name is John.*
No namesake have We given him aforetime.'
8 *He said, 'O my Lord, how shall I have a son, seeing my wife is barren,*
and I have attained to the declining of old age?'
9 *Said He, 'So it shall be; thy Lord says, "Easy is that for Me,*
seeing that I created thee aforetime, when thou wast nothing."'
10 *He said, 'Lord, appoint to me some sign.' Said He,*
'Thy sign is that thou shall not speak to men, though being without fault, three nights.'
11 *So he came forth unto his people from the Sanctuary, then he made signal to them,*
'Give you glory at dawn and evening.'
12 *'O John, take the [Scripture] forcefully'; and We gave him judgment, yet a little child,*

13 *and a tenderness from Us, and purity; and he was godfearing,*
14 *and cherishing his parents, not arrogant, rebellious.*
15 *'Peace be upon him, the day he was born, and the day he dies,*
and the day he is raised up alive!'

Though Zachariah's story roughly accords with the account in the Gospel of Luke, there are differences. Not only is it dramatised as a dialogue in which Zachariah has a voice of his own, but it also displays a more benevolent divine attitude towards the protagonist who is graced with acts of mercy. What is striking in this story is the affectionate portrayal of Zachariah: his self-expression in a secret prayer (not granted to him in Luke 1), his very personal way of approaching God in prayer, even using a particularly poetic reference to his predicament as an aged man without progeny. His prayer is answered by an angel or, more probably, by God Himself speaking in the indirect *rabbuka* form, by which He would refer to Himself as 'Thy Lord'. The story is thus charged with a new emotional dimension which is absent from the Gospel version, where the initiative is not with Zachariah but with an awe-inspiring angel who addresses him unexpectedly. Zachariah's doubtful response to the prediction – in view of his old age and the barrenness of his wife – is countered with a punitive measure in the Gospel; there, the angel Gabriel leaves him unable to speak until the prophecy is fulfilled. In contrast, Zachariah in the Qur'anic version, though equally hesitant to believe the annunciation, is made mute for only three days and has the assurance that the handicap will be removed. Most notably, however, this muteness is conveyed as the proof, that he himself had desired, of the words' authenticity. This particular intimacy is a trait of the stories about the Christian Holy Family which will be observed again in the continuation of their stories in *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*.

Interestingly, Zachariah's prayer, though heard by God, will not really be fulfilled. He prayed for a successor to his office as priest, but the son he is graced with will not succeed him as a servant of the temple but rather follow the opposite model, to live in purity dedicating his life to others. Although this contradiction is not made explicit in *Sūrat Maryam*, it is in Q. 3:39 which makes it clear that John will become an ascetic, an eremite (*ḥāṣūr*). In fact, it is not Zachariah's son, but Mary who will be attached to the temple. Not only is she raised there, but she will play a key role in the new temple-related tradition of Āl ʿImrān, the Christian Holy Family; more than this, the Qur'an does not reveal as it does not subscribe to her role in incarnation. Yet even indirectly, through the mere placing and naming of the protagonists, the Qur'an attests a momentous new development which, in Christian terms, reveals the parting of ways between Judaism and Christianity: the temple cult

being deserted and the church being established in its stead. In the later ecclesiastical understanding of this inter-testamentary phase of history, Zachariah and Mary represent the two great paradigms – the abandoned paradigm of the temple cult and the newly established one of Christian piety.

The setting of Zachariah's story is locally confined to the Jerusalem temple. As opposed to that, the events about Mary move her to quite heterogeneous places which are left anonymous. There is no mention of the concrete geographical sites that Mary is connected to in the Gospel stories. However, the scenery depicted in the Qur'an would admit the assumption of her sojourn in the Jerusalem temple (which is explicitly mentioned in *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*) and the desert in its vicinity, although, it would also seem to agree with a mythic space without a precise geographical identity. Her story, not unlike that of Zachariah's, is again introduced by an imperative 'to mention, to remember' in the recitation of the scripture.

The annunciation to Mary (Q. 19:16–21)

Q. 19:16–21

16 *And mention in the [Scripture] Mary*
when she withdrew from her people to an eastern place,
17 *and she took a veil apart from them; then We sent unto her Our Spirit*
that presented himself to her a man without fault.
18 *She said, 'I take refuge in the All-merciful from thee!'*
19 *If thou fearest God . . . He said, 'I am but a messenger come from thy*
Lord, to give thee a boy most pure.'
20 *She said, 'How shall I have a son*
whom no mortal has touched, neither have I been unchaste?'
21 *He said, 'Even so thy Lord has said: "Easy is that for Me;*
and that We may appoint him a sign unto men and a mercy from Us;
it is a thing decreed."'

The divine spirit approached Mary at a time when she had retreated from society and dissociated herself from her family. Her status reflects that of a nun or a recluse in Late Antiquity.[31] Such an image seems to have been inspired by the Protevangelium of James, but the story of the Protevangelium is not retold; rather, a mythical scenario without clear space and time coordinates is established: Mary has approached *an eastern place* (*makānan sharqiyya*, Q. 19:16). That location, which has no recognisable narrative function, can best be explained in exegetical terms. It seems to entail a reminiscence of a messianic Christian tradition that allegorically equates the body of Mary with the temple, whose (eastern) gate – according to the prophecy of Ezekiel 44:1 –

will only be opened by the Messiah.[32] It is Mary's womb that symbolises the gate of the temple through which the redeemer will come forth. This allegorical coding of the eastern place with its strong Christological implications is, however, dissolved in the Qur'an. Viewed within the Qur'anic context, the location presents itself rather as a station on Mary's way to the remote space where she will give birth. An allegory has thus been turned into a marginal narrative detail. Another de-allegorisation is to be found in Q. 19:17: Mary has covered herself with a veil, or perhaps hidden herself from her relatives with a curtain. This is reminiscent of the story of Mary weaving a curtain, which is reported in the Protevangelium but not retold in the Qur'an.[33] The Protevangelium's image of the curtain, whose reddish-purple colour entails a symbolic preview of her son's bloody sacrifice (again a Christological reference), is reused in the Qur'an as a mere accessory for the female figure. But even without the allegorical charge, the story retains symbolic implications. Mary, retreating from the space of her relatives, has entered a different, sacred realm, inaccessible to them. It is in this situation of being outside social space that the spirit (*rūḥ*) approaches her in the shape of *a man without fault* (Q. 19:17), not explicitly that of an angel, as in Luke, though *al-rūḥ* is often understood as the messenger angel par excellence. Mary, being a chaste young woman, suspecting sexual aggression, tries to evade him, appealing to his decency. He, however, identifies himself as a divine messenger sent to give her a boy.[34] There is no word of a divine election of Mary in this story, nor, at this stage, a prediction of the particular rank that the child will occupy beyond his becoming a prophet (*nabī*). Mary at first refuses to believe the message, and refers to her being without contact with men (as does Mary in Luke's version). Contrary to Luke's version, though, she is given no explanation or any sign; the Qur'anic speaker, instead, contents himself with a simple reference to God's omnipotence. Only in the end is there the promise that the child, who remains unnamed, will become a sign for the people and an example of divine mercy, qualities that do not go far beyond those of other prophets. The affair is no matter of negotiation, it does not require Mary's consent – her 'Let it be' – but has already been decreed; the last colon of Q. 19:21 seems to be a comment rather than part of the spirit's speech. The episode is epitomised in a somewhat later text that presents the spirit as the life-giving power that brings about Mary's pregnancy: *And she who guarded her virginity, so We breathed into her of Our spirit and appointed her and her son to be a sign unto all beings* (*waʾllatī aḥṣanat farjahā fa-nafakhnā fīhā min rūḥinā wa jaʿalnāhā waʾbnahā āyatan liʾl-ʿālamīn*, Q. 21:91). Mary's virginity, though not required as an element of the incarnation theologically, which the Qur'an does not accept, is her most prominent feature.[35]

Mary's giving birth (Q. 19:22–33)

Q. 19:22–33:

22 *So she conceived him, and withdrew with him to a distant place.*
23 *And the birthpangs surprised her by the trunk of the palm-tree.*
She said, 'Would I had died ere this, and become a thing forgotten!'
24 *But the one that was below her called to her, 'Nay, do not sorrow;*
see, thy Lord has set below thee a rivulet.
25 *Shake also to thee the palm-trunk,*
and there shall come tumbling upon thee dates fresh and ripe.
26 *Eat therefore, and drink, and be comforted;*
and if thou shouldst see any mortal, say,
"I have vowed to the All-merciful a fast, and today I will not speak to any man."'
27 *Then she brought the child to her folk carrying him; and they said,*
'Mary, thou hast surely committed a monstrous thing!
28 *Sister of Aaron, thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother a woman unchaste.'*
29 *Mary pointed to the child then; but they said,*
'How shall we speak to one who is still in the cradle, a little child?'
30 *He said, 'Lo, I am God's servant; God has given me the [Scripture],*
and made me a Prophet.
31 *Blessed He has made me, wherever I may be;*
and He has enjoined me to pray, and to give the alms, so long as I live,
32 *and likewise to cherish my mother; He has not made me arrogant, unprosperous.*
33 *Peace be upon me, the day I was born, and the day I die,*
and the day I am raised up alive!'

The second stage of the story focuses on Mary's delivery. There is no encounter of Mary with the mother of John (Elizabeth, unnamed in the Qur'an), no betrothal to Joseph, no journey to Bethlehem – the story is related completely without historical references. Rather, Mary, who had already kept herself distant from her family, retreats further from the inhabited space to *a distant place* (Q. 19:22) which seems to refer to a mythical rather than a real place. When the labour pains overcome her, she finds herself leaning against the trunk of a palm tree and utters words of despair.[36] The tree will soon turn out to be of a miraculous kind: a voice from below, be it that of the child that has just been born or that of an angel, calls on her to cheer up: God has provided for her. A water source has sprung up and the palm tree will drop fresh dates upon her.

She will also be safe from persecution by people as a result of a vow forbidding her to speak and by her infant son speaking up on her behalf. The plan indeed works: the newborn identifies himself as a prophet and a servant of God, and attests that he has been, like John before, charged to perform particular religious duties and been deemed worthy of the eulogy to be uttered over prophets.

Whereas the account of Zachariah in the Qur'an roughly corresponds to the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:8–25, 57–80), it is obvious that the story of Mary with its allusions to her separation from her family is much closer to the apocryphal Protevangelium of James.[37] That text was extremely influential in Late Antiquity and has reflected strongly, even in western church tradition, on the image of Mary: her identity as the daughter of Joachim and Anna, two saints of the church, is due to the Protevangelium. As Brown attests:

> [it inspired a great] image of continuity in connection with the piety of women ... This second-century narrative already presented Mary as a human creature totally enclosed in sacred space. It set the tone for all later descriptions of the consecrated woman: dedicated to the Temple at the age of three, Mary grew up in total isolation from the profane world. Later writers lingered insistently on this aspect of her life: it is the enclosed child, and not the grief-stricken mother of the Lord, that we meet most frequently in late antique literature.[38]

The Qur'anic account certainly has to be considered as part of this tradition. It has been noted that the Protevangelium draws an image of Mary fundamentally different from that of the text in Luke. Mary is thus depicted as rather inactive, there is no Marian consent (Luke 1:38) where she asserts her willingness to take upon herself her mission. Nor is there a magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) or an uttering of her decision to preserve the prophecies about her son in her heart (Luke 1:19). Rather, what matters in the Protevangelium is her ritual purity: she is kept apart from ordinary humans during her first years and then brought to be raised in the temple. She is removed from the temple when approaching puberty, again for ritual reasons. The central feature in the Protevangelium is her virginity that is miraculously affirmed even after her giving birth. As Mary F. Foskett states:

> [here] virginity functions as the most concrete and objectifying indication of Mary's holiness. By retaining her virginity *ante partum*, *in partu*, and *post partum*, Mary is transformed from being a *parthenos* in the cult to being a cult object. She embodies a purity that is absolute, untouchable, and unique. Not only is the portrayal of Mary more uniform in this narrative than in Luke-Acts, the nature and significance of her sexual status is absolute.[39]

In the Qur'an, the centrality of Mary's purity is obvious not only in *Sūrat Maryam*, but also in the reminiscence of the annunciation in Q. 21:91 where she is mentioned not by her name, but by an honorific built around her purity: *And she who guarded her virginity* (*wa'llatī aḥṣanat farjahā*).

Like the Protevangelium, the Qur'anic version in *Sūrat Maryam* depicts Mary as passive. She appears as the instrument of the divine plan rather than its courageous protagonist, falling into despair and uttering the wish to die rather than suffer. But more than that, particularly in the birth story, she appears as a mythic figure. This is, however, less due to the similarities to the Protevangelium than to the episode of her salvation related to the palm tree. That episode, which is not found in Luke or the Protevangelium, recalls the salvation of Hagar and her son Ishmael (Genesis 21:9–19) when God Himself from heaven saves mother and son by showing Hagar the spring. It has, however, a closer counterpart in the Gospel of pseudo-Matthew,[40] which was composed 'sometime between the middle of the sixth century – the date of Pope Gelasios' decree to ban the Protevangelium of James – and the end of the eighth century – the earliest manuscript evidence'.[41] That gospel may thus be later than the Qur'anic story, but perhaps relies on the same widespread tradition. It focuses on a palm tree growing in the desert that played a role during the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt. Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus, exhausted from the journey, long for food and water. Jesus calls upon the palm tree to bow down and spread its fruit over them. At the same time, a water source springs up miraculously to save the family from thirst. The context, then, is different from the Qur'anic story. In pseudo-Matthew, the story tells of an incident happening to a group; in it, Joseph plays a consoling part and the child is already born and able to act. The Qur'anic story, on the other hand, tells of a birth by a lone female figure who cannot avail herself of any human assistance; she is displaced, totally isolated and in despair. Suleiman Mourad has connected the story to Greek mythology, where the palm tree is associated with the worship of Apollo by his temple on the island of Delos.[42] Mourad, who has traced the reception of that story through Greek and Latin literature, comes to the conclusion that:

> the palm tree story in Qur'ān 19:22–24 is an obvious reworking of Leto's labour [while giving birth to Apollo] in the Greek tradition. It is about a distressed pregnant woman (Leto/Mary) who seeks an isolated place (Delos/remote spot), sits by the trunk (Greek *premnon*, Arabic *jidh*ʿ) of a palm tree next to a river (Inopos/stream) and delivers a holy child (Apollo/Jesus) . . . The palm tree story in Pseudo-Matthew seems to be an obvious later reworking of the version that found its way, in concise form, into the text of

> the Qur'ān. The Gospel preserves the palm tree miracle, but deletes the association of the birth-place of Jesus with the palm tree. The canonical gospels are almost silent about the circumstances of the birth of Jesus . . . It is not unlikely, then, that some early Christians, ignorant of the Gospel of Luke or unconvinced by it, circulated a story that was meant to describe the circumstances of Mary's labour and delivery . . . A possible group might be the Christian community of Najran, in West Arabia, who used to worship a palm tree before converting to Christianity. Changing the Leto/Apollo palm tree story to fit Mary/Jesus would have permitted them to keep part of their belief yet give it a Christian tone.[43]

However the exact ways of transmission, the Qur'anic story of Mary's delivery of Jesus, although beginning – with the appearance of the divinely dispatched spirit – with a miracle from the monotheistic framework, continues as a mythical story staging a prototypically sacred scenario (a woman in a remote place with a tree) surrounded by miracles, not all of which explicitly derive from God. The story of Mary reconnects to the monotheistic tradition at the end through the birth of a prophet (*nabī*), which is closely related to that of John in the preceding story that was devoid of pagan mythical elements.

In the final scene when Mary is reproached by her relatives, she is addressed by them as the 'sister of Aaron'. This, at first glance, appears to be an identification with the Old Testament Miriam mirroring a typological interpretation, cherished by the old church fathers, which sought to connect the events around Moses with those around Mary and Jesus. But as has been shown elsewhere,[44] the reference points to Aaron, not Moses, thus evoking other Biblical memories. Thus, the Protevangelium ascribes the choice of Joseph among suitable suitors for Mary's hand to a sign connected to Aaron: 'like Aaron whose rod alone bloomed among those of the Egyptian magicians, so Joseph's rod produced a dove, and this marked him for his destiny'.[45] The reference to Aaron points to a further dimension of significance, that is, to Mary's theological rank as a metaphorical prototype of the church, and thus implicitly of the Jerusalem temple (whose sacrificial cult goes back to Aaron). Following this argument, Mary may be called an Aaronid insofar as she symbolises the heritage of the temple – the Christian church; this view of Mary as the symbol of the church is a common topos of Christian Mariology.[46] Though this symbolic dimension has no theological bearing on the Qur'anic story, it will be maintained throughout the Qur'an and be reflected in Medina in the denomination of Mary's family as the House of Amram. Again, an ecclesiastical reference has been stripped of its allegorical function.

The infant Jesus who speaks up on behalf of his mother presents himself as a servant of God, a self-designation that in itself does not necessarily reflect a Christological argument meant to stress his human and thus non-divine nature; the qualification may simply be intended to echo the title of other prophets, such as Moses in the Hebrew Bible (see Nehemiah 10:29 and Revelation 15:3), or to reflect Jesus' own designation in Christian scripture (see Acts 3:13).[47] With the reference to the scripture that he has been given (Q. 19:30) we do, however, enter a field of interreligious differences. According to later Qur'anic texts, there are not four accounts about Jesus' accomplishments written down under divine inspiration by four 'canonical' evangelists, but Jesus himself is credited with a revelation which is on a par with the Torah and the Qur'an, see, for example, Q. 5:46: *and We gave to him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light* (*wa ātaynāhu'l-injīla fīhi hudan wa nūr*).[48] Jesus' account of his being blessed (Q. 19:31) and the final benediction to be uttered over him (Q. 19:33) both echo Luke 11:27–8. The command he has received, requiring the performance of *ṣalāt* and *zakāt*, may be understood as epitomising the two parts of the Ten Commandments.[49]

Finally, Jesus' statement about his death, (Q. 19:33), in view of the equally Meccan section, Q. 43:59–61, where Jesus is introduced as a 'sign of the Hour' (following 'Ikrima's 'non-canonical' reading),[50] may be understood as indicating an event to happen at the end of days:

Q. 43:59–61

59 *He is only a servant We blessed, and We made him to be an example to the Children of Israel.*
60 *Had We willed, We would have appointed angels among you to be successors in the earth.*
61 *[He is only a sign] of the Hour; doubt not concerning it, and follow me. This is a straight path.*

Whereas the issue of Jesus' crucifixion is ambiguous in the Qur'an, Jesus is in mainstream Muslim interpretation, assumed not to have been executed,[51] but to have been raised to heaven; according to later apocalyptic texts,[52] he is expected to return as a sign of the end of times and to defeat the Antichrist and only then to die. Also, in some Shi'i texts, he will reappear with the Mahdī/Qā'im at the end of time. This image of Jesus, which seems to be alluded to in (the uncanonical reading of) Q. 43:61, may perhaps be assumed to be the backdrop of his story in that sura from the beginning. It is noteworthy, however, that the Qur'an does not further dwell on this apocalyptic aspect. *Sūrat Maryam* introduces Jesus not as a dramatic figure with apocalyptic functions, but as a symbol, as if he had long been familiar to the listeners.

He is viewed primarily as the miraculously born child of a sacred female figure who, as an icon of purity, eclipses her son in her capacity to inspire the believers' pious imagination.

The later Meccan addition (Q. 19:34–40)

The story is followed by a non-narrative, exegetical section that is clearly distinct from its previous section based on its different rhyme pattern *–ūn/-īn* (typical of later suras). It comes across as a theological clarification of the preceding story, starting with the identification of the child, who until then had remained unnamed, as 'Īsā b. Maryam. Jesus is thus endowed with a matronymic in addition to his first name[53] – a unique practice in the Qur'an where prophets are called by their first names exclusively. The matronymic, which is maintained throughout the Qur'an, is certainly not inspired by Christian tradition where it occurs only once in Mark 6:3, nor by Jewish tradition where Jesus' origins tend to be defamed.[54] It rather sounds like an intended reformulation of Jesus' Christian title 'son of God', a reformulation that operates without completely glossing over the earlier designation. This again should be understood as a hermeneutical strategy, since the preservation of the formal shape of the familiar 'Jesus, son of God' in the new, theologically neutral 'Jesus, son of Mary' clearly marks the change as an intended correction of the Christian phrasing for the Arabic context.

This 'official' introduction of the prophetical figure of Jesus should not be taken to mean that the child's identity had been unknown until then; the deictic pronoun 'that' (*dhālika*) should rather point to the concluding statement of the preceding section about Jesus being a servant of God – in contrast to the allegations against him that are discussed in the ensuing verses. With this comment, the discourse leaves the mythical orbit and enters social reality.

Q. 19:34–40

34 *That is Jesus, son of Mary, in word of truth, concerning which they are doubting.*
35 *It is not for God to take a son unto Him. Glory be to Him! When He decrees a thing, He but says to it 'Be,' and it is.*
36 *Surely God is my Lord, and your Lord; So serve you Him. This is a straight path.*
37 *But the parties have fallen into variance among themselves; then woe to those who disbelieve for the scene of a dreadful day.*
38 *How well they will hear and see on the day they come to Us! But the evildoers even today are in error manifest.*

39 *Warn thou them of the day of anguish, when the matter shall be determined,*
and they yet heedless and unbelieving.
40 *Surely We shall inherit the earth and all that are upon it,*
and unto Us they shall be returned.

Jesus, son of Mary, no longer figures as a sign of divine mercy as he did in Q. 19:21, but as the subject of a dispute (Q. 19:34). The Qur'anic text implies that he was obviously being venerated by some people as an offspring of God (*walad*, or as read in Q. 19:88 by Ibn Mas'ūd, *wild*[55]), an allegation that is countered in the Qur'anic text with the statement of God's power to create immediately through His mere word,[56] and thus not needing to beget a child (Q. 19:35).[57] Jesus himself is quoted as viewing his relationship to God as that of a servant towards his lord (Q. 19:36);[58] though not explicitly marked as a quotation, this verse belongs to Jesus, in view of its unambiguous ascription to him elsewhere. The figure of Jesus is not only debated in the present time of the Qur'anic community, but had caused dissent in the past as well, since a schism occurred after his death (Q. 19:37). Thus, at first sight, Q. 19:34–40, which immediately follows the story of Jesus, may look like a polemic against the Christian belief in Jesus as the son of God. However, a comparison with the parallel text in *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (a slightly later text whose advanced discursive stance is obviously introduced to bring the text of *Sūrat Maryam* up to date) will reveal that the addition points to a debate within the contemporary pagan or syncretistic community, and that it thus has a different objective.

Stories of prophets (Q. 19:41–65)

Q. 19:34–40 serves to separate the stories of Zachariah and Mary from a longer narrative sequence of stories about prophets. The narrative section in Q. 19:41–65 marks a continuation of the two stories by starting with a further account about a parent–child relationship, the dispute between Abraham and his father (Q. 19:41–50). Abraham is portrayed as a dutiful son who tries in vain to avert his father from idolatry, and finally separates from him in a gentle way (Q. 19:47: *He said, 'Peace be upon thee!', qāla salāmun 'alayka*). Similar to the case of Mary who leaves her family, Abraham renounces his genealogical bonds to enter a transcendent relationship. The sequence continues with a reminiscence of the story of Moses' intimate relationship with God (Q. 19:51–3) and even shorter reminiscences of Ishmael (not being presented as the son of Abraham, but mentioned in isolation from his account, Q. 19:54–5) and Idrīs (Q. 19:56–7). It is lamented that these prophets had not been able to prevent the moral decline that was to occur after them. Yet, the narrative

points out there are believers who have maintained their faith in the prophets' message and that they will be rewarded with paradise (Q. 19:60–63). The narrative section is complemented by a somewhat unconnected verse quoting the direct speech of the angels (Q. 19:64), who affirm their being totally dependent on God's orders, an implicit rejection of their status as daughters of God that had been disputed extensively in several earlier Qur'anic texts.[59] The final verse of the section is an exhortation of the Prophet to continue serving God patiently.

The polemical section (Q. 19:66–98)

It turns out that Q. 19:34–40, with its polemic against the father–son relationship ascribed to God and Jesus, not only interrupts the narrative sequence about individual prophets but, on closer scrutiny, does not fit with the polemical section concluding *Sūrat Maryam* either. This text, Q. 19:66–98, argues against the unbelief concerning the Last Judgement (Q. 19:66–77) and laments the lack of reverence paid to the recitation (Q. 19:73–4). It goes on to address the ineffectualness of wealth and offspring (*walad/wild*) as tokens of safety from punishment (Q. 19:75–80), but the main offence mentioned is the adoption of other deities (*āliha*, Q. 19:81–2), for which the wrongdoers will be severely punished (Q. 19:83–7). It is in this context that the unbelievers are rebutted for having claimed that God had taken unto Himself a son: *that they have attributed to the All-merciful a son, and it behoves not the All-merciful to take a son* (*an da'au li'l-raḥmāni waladā, wa-mā yanbaghi an yattakhidha l-raḥmānu waladā*, Q. 19:91–2). With Q. 19:34–40 in mind, this statement might at first look as if the Christian dogma of a father–son relationship between God and Jesus was the topic of discussion. However, in view of the use of *walad/wild* for offspring in general (Q. 19:77), it rather appears to target the pagan pantheon made up of a supreme God and his offspring, and seems to allude equally to divine daughters, such as the angels or other female deities surrounding God that are claimed by the unbelievers as well.

Synopsis of Q. 19:34–40 and Q. 43:57–65

A clearer insight into the targets of the seemingly anti-Christian section in Q. 19:34–40 can be gained from its comparison with *Sūrat al-Zukhruf*, equally belonging to the *raḥmān* ensemble. *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* reflects a level of debate which presupposes the audience's knowledge of stories about Jesus' birth and his destiny to become a prophet. It is a sura that clearly presents itself as later than *Sūrat Maryam*. Its very beginning attests a high degree of self-reflection that was not yet realised in *Sūrat Maryam*; the claim to present an Arabic

recitation (*qur'ān 'arabī*) is nothing less than the claim to ultimate clarity warranted by the competence of native speakers, perhaps in response to earlier allegations against the Prophet that the Qur'an was dependent on informers who did not speak Arabic. At the same time, the Qur'an's 'original', the *umm al-kitāb* (Q. 43:4), is said in the text to be in the care of God. The claim to both divinely warranted authenticity and human accessibility marks the climax of the process of Qur'anic self-authorisation. It is also noteworthy that the final verse of *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* verbally quotes Abraham's reaction to his father's idol worship from the Abraham story told in *Sūrat Maryam*: both the Prophet Muhammad (Q. 43:89) and Abraham (Q. 19:47) dissociate themselves from idol worship by saying farewell (*salām*) to the pagans. Perhaps the most striking progress that has occurred in *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* as compared to *Sūrat Maryam* is the new attitude that the Prophet assumes towards the allegation of God having offspring. Whereas the speaker expresses shock at this assertion in *Sūrat Maryam* (Q.19:88–9: *And they say, 'The All-merciful has taken unto Himself a son.' You have indeed advanced something hideous!*), he is encouraged to present himself as a superior opponent in *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (Q. 43:81: *Say: 'If the All-merciful has a son, then I am the first to serve him.'*). The central topic of *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* is the polemic against the acceptance of female deities (Q. 43:15–22). It is obvious that the polemic is directed towards the pagan Meccans, who also loom behind the reproachful statement about the humble social status of the Prophet (Q. 43:31). *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* again presents the story of Moses, this time as an example of unbelievers ridiculing prophets for claiming to be higher in rank than they are (Q. 43:45–6).

As a further testimony of the unbelievers' wilful misunderstanding of the relationship between God and the alleged other deities, the case of 'Jesus, the son of Mary' is adduced. It is noteworthy that the discussion about Jesus is not with Christians but with pagans who are obviously knowledgeable about the belief in Jesus as the son of God, since they themselves raise the point claiming that their own deities, imagined as daughters of God, are better than Jesus. The Qur'anic voice rejects both assumptions, that is, the father–son relationship between Jesus and God, and the existence of a pantheon, in Q. 43:57–9 and Q. 43:63–5.

Q. 43:57–9:

57 *And when the son of Mary is cited as an example, behold, thy people turn away from it*

58 *and say, 'What, are our gods better, or he?' They cite not him to thee, save to dispute; nay, but they are a people contentious.*

59 *He is only a servant We blessed, and We made him to be an example to the Children of Israel.*

Finally, word is given to Jesus himself, who had come to do away with dissent and call people to worship God as his servants, but who eventually caused the sects (*al-aḥzāb*) to split:

Q. 43:63–5:

63 *And when Jesus came with the clear signs he said, 'I have come to you with wisdom,*
and that I may make clear to you some of that whereon you are at variance;
so fear you God and obey you me.

64 *Assuredly God is my Lord and your Lord; therefore serve Him; this is a straight path.'*

65 *But the parties among them fell into variance; so woe unto those who did evil,*
because of the chastisement of a painful day.

The final verse of this polemic affirming the split of the community into sects is roughly equivalent to Q. 19:37 and accords with the polemical tone in Q. 19:34–40. The verse preceding it (Q. 43:64) is almost identical to Q. 19:36 (barring the one word '*huwa*'), a verse that in *Sūrat Maryam* is not marked as Jesus' speech but only becomes identifiable as such through its parallel in Q. 43:64. Furthermore, it is the discussion in *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (Q. 43:57–65) that provides a situational context for the full naming of Jesus and stresses the concept of Jesus' servanthood as a logical response to an argument, whereas in *Sūrat Maryam* these issues are presented without any context. Q. 43:57–65 thus seems to have been the model for the similar, but stylistically isolated, Q. 19:34–40, a section which in terms of composition and argument seems also less fitting in its sura.

Q. 19:34–40 is best explained as a later addition that was deemed necessary to attach to the Jesus story once an argument about Jesus' relation to God had crystallised around him. In light of the synopsis of both *Sūrat Maryam* and *Sūrat al-Zukhruf*, it is evident that Q. 19:34–40 does not entail a debate with Christians, but rather with pagan Meccans who either had adopted Jesus into their pantheon or were at least knowledgeable about his rank in Christianity, although they themselves were little inclined to acknowledge him as superior to their deities. Denying Jesus the rank of the offspring of God, at this stage of the development of the Qur'anic discourse, was not part of a Christological debate with Christians, but an argument to counter the allegations put forward by pagans; it was meant primarily as a rejection of the pagan concept of a pantheon made up of a divine family.

Sūrat Maryam, before the addition of Q. 19:34–40, did not display any special interest in the nature of Jesus. Neither did it really deal with Jesus, whose birth

is less indicative of his miraculous nature than his mother's. It is true that the child works miracles, but bearing no name of his own he is a subordinate figure to his mother, and a kind of replica of John whose birth was reported before and whose rank he does not substantially eclipse. It is only with *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* that the son of Mary enters the stage as the subject of the dispute between the pagan unbelievers, who introduce him as an offspring of God, a rival to their female deities, and the new community, who does not subscribe to the idea of a divine family at all. Once Jesus becomes a topic of dispute, he is reintroduced into *Sūrat Maryam* belatedly in a new guise in order to dispel any possibility of the son of Mary being accepted by the community as the offspring of God.

Conclusions

The Qur'anic stories: Rejection of the post-Gospel theological developments of Late Antiquity

The stories about Zachariah and Mary, in spite of the similarity of their positions in the Gospel of Luke and in *Sūrat Maryam*, clearly mirror a post-Gospel development. In the Gospel of Luke, Zachariah is granted the long desired son in his old age, but there is no expectation raised that John will be his father's successor as the priest of the temple. Such a successor is, however, what the Qur'anic Zachariah prays for, though his prayers are answered with a son instead. Why, then, is the idea of successorship raised at all? To understand this, one has to consider the inter-testamentary position of John (and Zachariah and Mary). The priestly, sacrificial model is substituted by another form of piety: after Zachariah, the priest (i.e. after the abolishment of a temple cult), a new type of worshipper, embodied by John, the ascetic, and Mary, the pious faithful, will arise.

According to Christian tradition, the paradigm of the physical sacrifice conducted in the temple was superseded by a new paradigm of spiritual sacrifice through prayer. This turn seems to be reflected in the Protevangelium of James and accordingly in the Qur'an, where it is Mary who is established in the temple. Though the Qur'an is not interested in the theological transition from Judaism to Christianity, this and other ecclesiastical perceptions of the succession are nevertheless traceable in the Qur'anic narrative, as we saw, for example, in Q. 19:16 and Q. 19:18. The Qur'an, however, strips away the Christological subtext of the ecclesiastical interpretations, thus clearly testifying to its theological intent to not subscribe to that message.

The most striking peculiarity of the Qur'anic version of the story about Zachariah and Mary is the cutting of their functional link: in the Qur'an, the

son who is miraculously born to Zachariah is not the precursor to Jesus, the other figure who is equally miraculously born to Mary. In its presentation of the two stories as being functionally unrelated, the Qur'an sustainably expunges the Christological dimension.

The Qur'anic additions: Revisions within the communication process

It appears that the additions of both the Meccan polemic section of Q. 19:34–40 and the Medinan genealogy of the prophets in Q. 19:58[60] – that, in terms of literary form, disturb the stylistic unity of the sura – were deemed necessary to keep the sura up to date. *Sūrat Maryam*, in its original shape (i.e. without the additions), introduced Jesus as a child miraculously born to a virgin and sacred figure. His story and Mary's are initially edificatory stories attesting to God's omnipotence and mercy. *Sūrat Maryam* is a text that is, perhaps more than any other in the Qur'an, imprinted with female associations. The divine name *raḥmān*, derived from the root that primarily denotes the female womb, *raḥm*, appears no less than sixteen times in the sura, by far the highest quota in any Qur'anic text; the word *raḥma* (mercy), another derivative of it that had not been used in Qur'anic texts before (it never featured in the early Meccan suras), appears twice in Q. 19:2 and Q. 19:21, and a third time it is paraphrased by *ḥanān* in Q. 19:13. The two main stories are about becoming pregnant and giving birth. Another parent–child relationship, though implying a father instead of a mother, continues them. The sura in its second part (Q. 19:66–98) reverses the positive image of the parent–child relationship by underscoring the blasphemous character of applying such a relationship to God. The stories about the diverse prophets (Q. 19:41–65) seem to provide an intermediate link between the two main parts as they determine the highest degree of closeness to God that can be attained by a human being who may be God's prophet but certainly not his child.

In view of this ensemble, it must come as a surprise that at the end of the Mary/Jesus story, Jesus is introduced through a textual addition, as the bearer of a dogmatic truth. He is not left at the rank of a servant of God blessed with the two 'essential commandments', the love of God (epitomised in *ṣalāt*) and the love of man (epitomised in *zakāt*), with which the original sura endows him. Rather, in the later reading of the sura, in the context of the theologically motivated addition of Q. 19:34–40, he turns into a clearly determined character associated with a particular motto, *Surely God is my Lord, and your Lord; so serve him. This is a straight path* (Q. 19:36, taken from Q. 43:64). This remains his motto also in the Medinan texts Q. 3:51 and Q. 5:117. In a slightly different wording used in Q. 21:92 and Q. 23:52, it echoes

the first of the Ten Commandments: 'I am the Lord thy God . . .' (Exodus 20:2).[61] This motto, which encapsulates the confession of God's unity, unambiguously negates the existence of a father–son relationship between God and Jesus.

A second topic associated with Jesus in the later reading of *Sūrat Maryam* and other Meccan communications concerns his ambivalent role in religious history. It is Jesus' appearance, perhaps, that triggered the cleft that occurred between the Jews and the Jewish-Christians, which had been one community before him.[62] It may, however, equally target the empirical fact of the existence of diverse Christian sects rivalling each other during Muhammad's time. The lament about that splitting of the community is raised first in Q. 43:65, and it appears again in the addition in Q. 19:37. In the later suras it seems to be Jesus himself who – by means of a quotation of God's divine injunction – explicitly calls for unity: *'Surely this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord; so serve Me'* (Q. 21:92). Equally in Q. 23:51–2, the call for unity seems to belong to Jesus:

Q. 23:51–2

51 *'O Messengers, eat of the good things and do righteousness;*
surely I know the things you do.
52 *Surely this community of yours is one community,*
and I am your Lord; so fear Me.'

This also seems to be the case in the late Meccan verse Q. 42:13:

Q. 42:13

He has laid down for you as religion that He charged Noah with,
and that We have revealed to thee, and that We charged Abraham with,
Moses and Jesus: 'Perform the religion, and scatter not regarding it.'
Very hateful is that for the idolators . . .

The insistence on preserving unity is certainly reminiscent of the Gospel of John (particularly John 17:11). This image of the division between the religious communities somehow discredits Jesus' mission to bring about unity. From a certain stage of the Qur'anic development onwards, an atmosphere of dispute surrounds the figure of Jesus, long before the Medinan texts were to raise the polemics against the concept of the trinity and related controversial issues. Indeed, Jesus, who had become a figure of dispute between the nascent community and the pagans, at the same time represented the sole prophetic figure who, unintentionally, occasioned the most momentous dispute in religious history, a dispute that was to survive for epochs and was still perceived by the Qur'anic community.

The addressees

Where are the listeners of the Qur'an, the emerging community, to be located? In view of Jesus' first very undramatic self-introduction as a prophet and a servant of God (Q. 19:30) in the still un-extended composition of *Sūrat Maryam*, it appears that the Christological problem had long been resolved within Muhammad's community, and that there was indeed a consensus that Jesus was a non-divine though divinely elected figure when the dispute with the pagans – who upheld the belief that God had offspring or at least adopted children – arose (*Sūrat al-Zukhruf* and later *Sūrat Maryam*). Only from then on was a more expressive statement about Jesus' rank as a servant of God deemed a necessary caveat to the statements about his genetic relationship to God.

The explicit Qur'anic statements from the Meccan period – Jesus' miraculous birth from a virgin, his equally unique gift of working miracles (though in Mecca these miracles are confined to Jesus speaking when still in the cradle), his rank as a prophet and his expected return at the end of time (Q. 43:61) – certainly do indicate that the listeners were aware of Christianity. However, the low-key portrait of Jesus, who is nowhere presented as a divine figure but as a mere servant of God and as a messenger, strongly suggests a syncretistic community. One does not need to refer to a Jewish-Christian background.[63] The Qur'anic insistence on the great schism, on the emergence of *aḥzāb* after the death of Jesus, can equally be taken to suggest an understanding of *al-aḥzāb* in the sense of later extant Christian sects. Sidney Griffith has convincingly argued that it is highly problematic to deduce historical facts from textual manifestations which, like the Qur'an, are not meant to convey historical information and thus remain ambiguous. The opposite argument would be appropriate. Having discussed the arguments most frequently adduced in favour of a Jewish-Christian milieu of the Qur'an, Griffith concludes:

> it has been the burden of this study to substantiate credibly the hypothesis that the mainline, Syriac-speaking Christian communities of Syria/Palestine and Mesopotamia, i.e. the so-called 'Melkites', 'Jacobites' and 'Nestorians', . . . were in fact the principal communities from whom the Arabic-speaking Christians in the Qur'an's milieu learned their faith and with whom they were in continuous communication from the mid[dle] of the sixth century onward.[64]

The present chapter advocates a similar change in perspective. What is reflected in the Meccan texts is not the scenario of a 'heathen prophet'

borrowing from Jews, Christians or Jewish-Christians, as Muhammad is still often portrayed in historical scholarship, but rather an interaction between the Prophet and his community. This community would have been imprinted with mostly Christian traditions and would have long ago reached a consensus about a number of theological issues related to Jesus and Christianity, thus eliminating the need for further negotiation of these issues. A related scenario is formulated by Griffith, who does not, however, specify the situation of the Qur'anic emergence as an exchange between living advocates of diverse theological convictions, but more neutrally speaks of 'the Qur'an' as if it occurred in a static instance:

> The crucial hermeneutic stance adopted in this inquiry involves the assumption of the literary, or scriptural, integrity of the Qur'an, however it came about. It further assumes that the Qur'an, in accordance with a number of its own asseverations, conceives itself to be a scripture in dialogue with preceding scriptures and traditions, and the lore of mainly Jewish and Christian communities in its midst, to which it alludes and on which it offers an often exegetical commentary. The Qur'an presumes that its audience is aware of the narratives of the earlier prophetic figures and other aspects of the religious lore of Jews and Christians to which and to whom it often alludes by name.[65]

In spite of the widely shared stance, I disagree with Griffith on one substantial point. It is not without methodological consequences which particular position a scholar adopts concerning the question of how 'the Qur'an came about'. If the scenario is assumed to be static, with no process of proclamation involved – the Qur'an manifesting one and the same stance throughout its emergence – how are the ideological differences held in different suras then to be explained? How come the miraculously born child in *Sūrat Maryam* is explicitly identified as Jesus and signified theologically only through a later added text that is clearly marked as not originally being part of the sura? Any compiler would have integrated these details from the beginning. Even more substantial shifts in position can be demonstrated in those narratives about Mary and Jesus that are ascribed to the Medinan phase of the Qur'an's emergence.[66] The static scenario raises more questions than it can solve. It is the opposite scenario of a vivid exchange within a changing community which successively reach consensus about their theological stances, that explains the otherwise emerging striking inconsequences. It would also explain why the Meccan communications that presuppose familiarity with substantial Christian beliefs do not engage in polemics against other Christian doctrines that they disagree with but remain confined to more local exchanges with

syncretistic pagans who obviously included Jesus in a divine pantheon similar to their own. Obviously, there were no theologically educated Christians to be found in Mecca who could have provoked such an anti-Christological polemic. It is striking that many Qur'anic utterings reflect Christian tradition without being marked as such,[67] thus suggesting a high degree of familiarity among the Meccan community with Jesus' preaching. It is only in Medina, when more dogmatically minded Christians entered the horizon of the community, that the debate was extended to include discussions about Christology, and a more theologically informed polemical attitude against particular Christian dogmas emerged. This successive developing of a religio-political dimension in the discussion of Christian issues is strongly reminiscent of the analogous development of the Qur'anic attitudes towards Jewish tradition held during the Meccan communication, on the one hand, and towards later Jewish opponents in Medina, on the other.[68]

Adopting the perspective that the Qur'an is not a static corpus, but a corpus resulting from a communication process, one will look at the striking scarcity of references to Jesus in the Qur'an from a new angle: the reason for the under-representation of Jesus in the Qur'an may be the listeners' very familiarity with Jesus, his presence in their consciousness, rather than his absence from their thinking. The later readings of *Sūrat Maryam* and the related later Meccan texts – *Sūrat al-Zukhruf*, *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'*, *Sūrat al-Mu'min* and *Sūrat al-Shūrā* (Q. 42) – do not contradict this impression. They presuppose roughly the same circles of listeners who, in view of the schism occurring in Meccan society due to the Prophet's preaching, may have become particularly sensitive to the disunity prevailing among Christians – a situation which they attributed to a schism that had occurred in earlier history. According to the consensus of the community reflected in the Meccan Qur'an, this schism came about after Jesus' ministry: Jesus, a preacher of unity, had ironically become the landmark of a substantial cleft in religious history, a trigger of dispute – perhaps not unlike Muhammad himself during his Meccan ministry. The reference to Jesus serves to make a point about the situation of Muhammad himself.

NOTES

1 See Tor Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islam und das Christentum* (Uppsala, 1926); Griffith, 'Christians and Christianity'; Busse, *Theologische Beziehungen*; Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity: The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'ān and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (London, 1991); Martin Bauschke, *Jesus im Koran* (Cologne, 2001); Harald Suermann, 'Early Islam in the Light of Christian and Jewish Sources', in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx, eds., *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 135–48.

2 Jesus ('Īsā) is mentioned nineteen times in the Qur'an. The only Meccan instances of a longer discussion about him are found in the middle Meccan texts Q. 19:15–34 and Q. 43:57–65. Short reminiscences about Jesus appear in Q. 21:91, Q. 23:50, Q. 42:13 and Q. 6:85. An attempt to identify later elaborations of post-Muhammadan redactors has been made by Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, pp. 168–94. Exclusively text-based analyses like these, however, need to be thoroughly rethought in light of recent scholarship on the Qur'an's inter-communal environment; see Sidney Griffith, '*al-Nāṣāra* in the Qur'ān: A Hermeneutical Reflection', in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, pp. 301–22. For the reception of Syriac and Coptic traditions in the Qur'anic stories about Mary and Jesus, see Cornelia B. Horn, 'Intersections: The Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* in Sources from the Christian East and in the Qur'ān', *Apocrypha* 17 (2006), pp. 113–50; eadem, 'Mary between Bible and Qur'an: Soundings into the Transmission and Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* on the Basis of Selected Literary Sources in Coptic and Copto-Arabic and of Art-Historical Evidence Pertaining to Egypt', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18 (2007), pp. 509–38; eadem, 'Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on Structural and Motif Parallels Regarding Jesus' Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: The "Book of Mary", the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John*, and the Qur'ān', *Apocrypha* 19 (2008), pp. 267–91; Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 130–47.

3 See Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (London, 1985).

4 See chapter 10, 'Narrative'; Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 653–71.

5 For source critical studies on the monotheistic traditions reflected in the Qur'an, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*; Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum* (Stuttgart, 1922); Joseph Henninger, *Spuren christlicher Glaubenswahrheiten im Koran* (Schöneck/Beckenried, 1951); Erwin Gräf, 'Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran II', in Rudi Paret, ed., *Der Koran* (Darmstadt, 1975), pp. 188–91.

6 See Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*; see also Hopkins, Review of *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*.

7 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*; Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, pp. 10–19.

8 Wansbrough's hypothesis that the Qur'an and Islam emerged from a milieu temporally and geographically different from the traditionally assumed Meccan/Medinan environment does not stand up to critical evaluation; see the discussion in Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, pp. 23–31 and Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 91–6. Recently discovered manuscript evidence, furthermore, precludes a dating of the ultimate text of the Qur'an any later than the first/seventh century.

9 Polemics against idolatry is the topic of a monograph by Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*. Unfortunately, the author dispenses with a microstructural reading and a thorough historical analysis of the Qur'anic evidence that he uses. In the chapter dedicated to 'Idols and idolatry in the Koran', he makes no attempt to sketch a development of the Qur'anic discourse on idolatry. Nor does he neatly confine himself to the Qur'an, but conflates arguments drawn from exegesis with those of the Qur'an. The results, though inspiring as far as Islamic tradition is concerned, are forcibly imposed on the Qur'an, a text that does not receive due consideration in the book; for a critical evaluation, see Ludwig Ammann *Die Geburt des Islam: Historische Innovation durch Offenbarung* (Göttingen, 2001), pp. 105–7.

10 For more on the manuscript evidence, see Puin, 'Observations', and, more recently, Déroche, *La transmission écrite*. For more on the philological-historical evidence, see Hamdan, 'The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project'; Francois de Blois, '*Naṣrānī* (Nazoraios) and *hānīf* (ethnikos): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam', *Bulletin of the*

School of Oriental and African Studies 65, no. 1 (2002), pp. 1–30; Susanne Krone, *Die altarabische Gottheit al-Lāt* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992); Ammann, *Die Geburt des Islam*.

11 See chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'; Neuwirth, 'Form and Structure'; eadem, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 276–331.

12 For the Medinan development of Mary and Jesus, see chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'.

13 See Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, p. 121. It is noteworthy that the *Fātiḥa*, whose existence and cultic use is affirmed in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* (see chapter 6, '*Fātiḥa*'), is one of the *raḥmān* suras. The solution to the problem why *al-raḥmān* was the divine name current for a particular time will therefore be dependent on the clarification of how the *Fātiḥa* was introduced into the earliest Islamic worship. The divine name *al-raḥmān* remains, of course, in use through the *basmala* which precedes the text of every single sura.

14 The seven suras are *Sūrat Maryam*, *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'*, *Sūrat al-Furqān*, *Sūrat Yāsīn* (Q. 36), *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (Q. 43), *Sūrat al-Mulk* and *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*. Though *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* is classified as part of this group it is not considered here to be a sura (see chapter 6, '*Fātḥa*').

15 See Neal Robinson, 'Jesus', *EQ*, vol. III, pp. 7–21 and Barbara Freyer Stowasser, 'Mary', *EQ*, vol. III, pp. 288–95. See also Johan Bouman, *Das Wort vom Kreuz und das Bekenntnis zu Allah: Die Grundlehren des Korans als nachbiblische Religion* (Frankfurt am Main, 1980); Edward Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (New York, 1965); Nilo Geagea and Lawrence T. Fares, *Mary of the Koran: A Meeting Point between Christianity and Islam* (New York, 1984); Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 'Chosen of all Women: Mary and Fāṭima in Qur'ānic Exegesis', *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981) pp. 19–28; Claus Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus* (Wien, 1978); Zahniser, 'The Word of God'.

16 See Frantz Buhl, 'Zur Koranexegese', *Acta Orientalia* 3 (1924), pp. 97–108.

17 For the development, see Busse, *Theologische Beziehungen*, pp. 128–40; Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, pp. 127–41. Pohlmann (*Die Entstehung des Koran*), disregarding chronology, constructs a post-Muhammadan development.

18 For the attempt to periodise Qur'anic texts according to their progressing degree of self-authorisation, see chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'; Sinai, 'Qur'ānic Self-Referentiality'; Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, vol. I, pp. 39–63.

19 On Qur'anic rhymes, see Neuwirth, *Studien*, pp. 65–123.

20 Nöldeke's argument that the shift in rhyme suggests a later dating of this second part of the sura is unconvincing; Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, p. 130.

21 Analytical expressions, like *al-'aẓmu minnī* instead of simply *'aẓmī*, are characteristic of ancient Arab poetry; see Alfred Bloch, *Vers und Sprache im Altarabischen: Metrische und syntaktische Untersuchungen* (Basel, 1946). The highly metaphoric circumscription of the plain fact of Zachariah's old age is unique to the Qur'an. Its exact phrasing *ishta'ala'l-ra'su shayban* seems not to be attested elsewhere in poetry; see Albert Arazi and Salman Masalha, eds, *al-'Iqd al-thamīn fī dawāwīn al-shu'arā' al-sitta al-jāhilīyyīn = Six Early Arab Poets*, new edition and concordance based on W. Ahlwardt's *The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets* (Jerusalem, 1999).

22 Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, p. 130.

23 Arberry's translation has been changed here from the past tense, 'fell', to the present tense.

24 The verse Q. 19:58 is acknowledged to be a Medinan addition in Islamic tradition itself; see Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe*.

25 See chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'.

26 The temple is called *miḥrāb* only in the stories of Zachariah (Q. 19:11, Q. 3:37, Q. 3:39) and Mary (Q. 3:37). It appears otherwise as *masjid* (Q. 17:1, see note 28). For a discussion of the etymology, see Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 140–43.

27 The Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) is the hymn Mary uttered during her visit to John's mother Elizabeth. For the history of the two texts that stem from a Maccabean psalm written by

partisans of John the Baptist, see David Flusser, 'The Magnificat, the Benedictus and the War Scroll', in David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 126–49.

28 For the understanding of *miḥrāb* as the Jerusalem temple, see Neuwirth, 'The Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Islam'. *Miḥrāb* is used in the Qur'an in the context of stories from Christian tradition whereas *masjid* serves as the designation for the temple in the Jewish context. See also chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.

29 For the text of the Protevangelium, see Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas: With Introduction, Notes, and Original Text Featuring the New Scholars Version Translation* (Santa Rosa, CA, 1995).

30 The word *zakāt* in the section on John (in Q. 19:13) may still be understood in the sense of the Aramaic original *zakhutha*, meaning purity. It may thus point to living in purity rather than to almsgiving. However, in the other instances of *zakāt* in the text (Q. 19:31, 55), this is most likely to be understood as 'almsgiving'.

31 See Brown, *The Body and Society*.

32 For the full allegorical dimension of the figure of Mary, see Marx, 'Glimpses of a Mariology'; chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'. The eastern gate of the temple will be opened, according to Ezekiel 44:1, only by God himself. The old church fathers (Hieronymos and Ambrosius) applied the prophecy to Jesus by using an allegorical interpretation that equated the temple with the body of Mary: 'Only Christ opened the closed doors of the womb'. Due to this allegorical interpretation, Mary is connected to the area east of the temple; see Paret, *Kommentar*. In the Qur'anic context, this relation is, however, de-allegorised and turned into simply a local reference – a case not unique to the Qur'an.

33 See Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven, 2009), p. 11; Protevangelium 10.1 (Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*, pp. 379–80).

34 There is a canonical variant, *li-yahaba* (that He [God] will give you), according to the *Warsh 'an Nāfi'* reading which makes God's direct intervention instrumental.

35 It is noteworthy that Jewish tradition does question Mary's virgin birth, constructing a story about Jesus as the illegitimate son of a foreigner; see Johann Maier, *Jesus von Nazareth in der talmudischen Überlieferung* (Darmstadt, 1978), pp. 260–67; see also Rubin, *Mother of God*, pp. 14–16.

36 The tree is introduced with a definite article, as if it were known.

37 For the text of the Protevangelium, see Hock, *The Infancy Gospels*.

38 Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 273. See also Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, tr., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, CA, 1987).

39 Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Bloomington, IN, 2002), p. 164.

40 Wilhem Schneemelcher and Robert McLachlan Wilson, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 370–88.

41 Suleiman A. Mourad, 'From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam: The Origin of the Palm Tree Story Concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qur'ān', *Oriens Christianus* 86 (2002), p. 207.

42 Ibid., p. 207.

43 Ibid., p. 213. A reminiscence of Greek mythology may be recognised in the Qur'anic images of the paradisiacal virgins too; see Saleh, 'Etymological Fallacy'.

44 See chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'. In view of the recurring reference to the family of Aaron, it is less probable that the reference is a mere historical one, as Reynolds (*The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, p. 145) holds: 'the Qur'an names Mary the "sister of Aaron" for the same reason that Luke names Elizabeth the descendant of Aaron: she is associated with the priestly office of Israel'. Yes, she is associated with the priestly office of Israel, however not only in the sense of enjoying a particular status but in an allegorical function as a 'type', a prefiguration of the church which supplants the temple.

45 See Rubin (*Mother of God*, p. 11), who refers to the Protevangelium 9.1.

46 See, for example, the *Akathistos Hymnos* (the 'Praise of the Virgin'): 'Rejoice tabernacle of God and the Word! Rejoice, greater than the Holy of Holies! . . . Rejoice, immovable tower of the Church' (Leena Mari Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* [Leiden, 2001], pp. 16–17); see also Marx, 'Glimpses of a Mariology'. For translations of pertinent Syriac texts from the hymns of Ephrem, see Sebastian Brock, *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches* (Kerala, 1994).

47 Busse, *Theologische Beziehungen*, p. 127.

48 Sidney H. Griffith has discussed the two perceptions of the Gospel in detail. It is noteworthy that no translation of the Gospel was extant at Muhammad's time; see Griffith, 'The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century', in Sidney Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 126–67; see also Sidney H. Griffith, 'Gospel', *EQ*, vol. II. pp. 342–3.

49 Busse, *Theologische Beziehungen*, p. 128. The possibility that *zakāt* is still taken to mean purity, as in the prophecy of John before, cannot be excluded.

50 As transmitted in a 'non-canonical' reading (*qirā'a shādhdha*) by 'Ikrima, Jesus' qualification should be read as 'Jesus is a sign of the Hour' (*'alamun li'l-sā'a*) instead of the canonical 'It is knowledge of the Hour' (*'ilmun li'l-sā'a*); see Jeffery, *Materials*, p. 173.

51 Q. 4:157 is ambiguous as it may be understood as negating Jesus' death altogether; but most likely the issue remains undecided. What is negated is that the Jews initiated his killing; see Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford, 2009). In exegesis, however, his death on the cross is mostly categorically negated.

52 See Frederik Leemhuis, 'Apocalypse', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 111–14; see also David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, NJ, 2002).

53 The matronymic designation 'the son of Mary' appears only once in the New Testament (Mark 6:3); otherwise, Jesus is referred to as the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23, 4:22; John 1:45, 6:42). The two genealogies of Jesus end with Joseph (Matthew 1:1–17) or start with him (Luke 3:23–38); see Bauschke, *Jesus im Koran*, p. 22.

54 Hans Waldenfels, 'Maria zwischen Talmud und Koran', *Zeitschrift fur Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 73 (1989), pp. 97–108.

55 See Jeffery, *Materials*, p. 59.

56 God's creation of Jesus by a single word will be underscored further in later texts about Jesus, where he will be equated to Adam who was created through the imperative *kun* ('Be!') before.

57 It is noteworthy that it is not God's begetting a child, but His 'taking someone as a child' that is debated here.

58 Q. 19:36 cannot be the speech of Muhammad, which is never in the 'I' form, except if introduced by *qul* ('say').

59 The angels had already been the focus of the early Meccan *Sūrat al-Najm* which allegedly once contained the satanic verses. The angels' status is again the subject of dispute in Q. 43:19, a text closely related to *Sūrat Maryam*. The angels reappear as well in a third *raḥmān* sura (*Sūrat al-Anbiyā'*), where they are again characterised as absolutely dependent on God (Q. 21:26–9). For the wider religious context of the angels and their disputed competences, see Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (Berlin, 1975). For the Abraham story (Q. 19:41–50), see chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.

60 For this addition, see chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'.

61 Busse, *Theologische Beziehungen*, p. 133.

62 This was the opinion presented in the original version of this chapter which, after the appearance of the seminal article by Griffith (*'Nāṣāra'*), seems no longer tenable. The text has been altered accordingly.

63 The assumption of a Jewish-Christian background to the Qur'an was put forward by Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, vol III, *Die Entwickelung des kirchlichen Dogmas* (Tübingen, 1910; repr., Darmstadt, 1990) and Adolf Schlatter, 'Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam', *Evangelisches Missions-Magazin Neue Folge* 62 (1918) pp. 251–67. It was then resumed by Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen, 1949); idem, *Urgemeinde-Judenchristentum-Gnosis* (Tübingen, 1956); idem, *Das Judenchristentum: Untersuchungen über Gruppenbildungen und Parteikämpfe in der frühen Christenheit* (Bern, 1964). In 1974, Lüling, in his *Über den Ur-Qur'ān*, tried to introduce it into Qur'anic studies, basing his argument, however, on a speculative reworking of the Qur'anic text. More recently, de Blois (*'Naṣrānī'*) has also tried to argue again for a Jewish-Christian background to the Qur'an. Presently, El Badawi ('Condemnation in the Qur'ān') is trying to demonstrate Jewish-Christian traces in the Qur'an. See also Patricia Crone, 'Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), pp. 59–95.

64 Griffith, *'Nāṣāra'*, p. 321.

65 Ibid., p. 321.

66 See chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'.

67 See, for instance, the collection of texts in Rudolph, *Abhängigkeit*.

68 See chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures'.

13

Mary and Jesus: Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs. A Re-reading of *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19) in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Q. 3)*

Introduction: *Sūrat Maryam* and *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*

THE PRESENT chapter continues the discussion of the Meccan accounts of Mary and Jesus.[1] Though drawing on the analysis of these Meccan texts, it attempts to uncover the substantially new reading that these Christian stories were given in Medina. Decisive religio-political developments that arose after the *hijra* are clearly reflected in the Medinan Qur'an, where earlier texts were frequently remodelled so that the emerging community could respond to the challenges directed towards them by learned representatives of the older monotheistic traditions;[2] *Sūrat Maryam* was no exception. It was subjected to a re-reading that served a double religio-political purpose: to tackle the, by then, burning issue of Christological controversies so as to achieve a rapprochement with the Christians (labelled Āl 'Imrān in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*) and to cope with the predominant Jewish tradition represented by the Israelites (Āl Ibrāhīm), whose superiority, in terms of scriptural authority, the community wished to counterbalance.

The Prologue (Q. 3:1–32) and its Relation to the Narrative (Q. 3:33–62)

Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, an early Medinan text, documents a later rethinking of the stories of Mary and Jesus contained in *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19:1–32), presenting new perspectives on the earlier text. David Marshall, in his survey on Christianity in the Qur'an, has described this sura as marking a change:

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Mary and Jesus, Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs: A Re-reading of *Sūrat Maryam* in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Q 3.1–62)', *Parole de l'Orient* 30 (2005), pp. 231–60. Reprinted by kind permission of the publisher.

> where we find slightly more attention [than in the Meccan and earlier Medinan texts] paid to Jesus and Mary, especially at 3:33–58. This long narrative section must be understood in the light of Muhammad's relationship with the Jews of Medina in the period shortly after the battle of Badr. The refusal of the great majority of the Jews to acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet, along with the political threat to Muhammad which they posed, made this relationship extremely tense with the threat of violent conflict in the air; this mood of hostility is reflected at various points in the rest of surah 3 (e.g. vv. 19–25, 65–85, 110–112, 187).[3]

The Medinan sura does not have a particularly unified structure, but appears to be made up of diverse layers belonging to different periods.[4] Mathias Zahniser has submitted the narrative part of the sura to an in-depth analysis, focusing on its structure.[5] He divides the sura into three parts: Q. 3:1–62, Q. 3:63–99 and Q. 3:100–200. Indeed, there is a clear caesura after Q. 3:62, which is the closing verse of the story of Mary and Jesus. After Q. 3:62 a sermon follows, addressed to the newly introduced group, the 'people of the scripture' (the *ahl al-kitāb*), a section that obviously relies on the text preceding it for its arguments. As such, Q. 3:1–62 is to be considered as the earliest part, the nucleus of the sura.

The following observations will go beyond a narrative analysis and try to trace the *Sitz im Leben* of the text, that is, its sociopolitical function within the historical development of the Qur'an. For this purpose, not only will the core story of the family of Mary and Jesus (Q. 3:33–62), labelled 'the House of Amram', be analysed,[6] but also the introductory section (Q. 3:1–32). It is this latter text, which until now has received little attention, which, according to our reading, spells out the new significance of the Christian tradition to the emerging Muslim community at the time when this extensive narrative of Mary and Jesus was communicated. Q. 3:1–32 may thus be duly regarded as a prologue to the narratives.

The text, partly a direct address to and partly a report about the Medinan Jews,[7] presents a rethinking of the, until then, unquestioned rank of the Israelites as the sole elects and transmitters of scripture. The story of Mary and Jesus, which had already been the object of a highly sophisticated presentation in *Sūrat Maryam*, would not have required retelling for purely liturgical or edificatory purposes. Thus, the fact that the story is retold in an extended form in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* suggests that there was a theological or, indeed, a religio-political intention involved. In the new version of the story in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, the sole female protagonist of *Sūrat Maryam* is further empowered by a second, more active figure, her own mother, who provides her with a uniquely matrilineal genealogy. In addition, the presentation of Jesus, who is introduced in the capacity of a

prophet for the first time, turns out to be a reversal of the public self-representations of earlier prophets, since it strikingly displays non-patriarchal traits.

What is equally important is the story's predominantly female discourse centred around female purity, and the sacredness of procreation and giving birth. This has spilled over to the introductory section of the sura, which is otherwise primarily a patriarchal prophetic discourse centred around revelation. Thus, the topic of revelation, usually the introductory theme of later suras, in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* acquires a strikingly new tenor, being interwoven with unmistakably female-oriented arguments. The discourse about revelation, which had previously been imprinted with male concerns and patriarchal positions,[8] now conveys images and concerns associated with the female realm. This observation cannot, of course, be viewed in isolation from the core aim of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, which is the presentation of a line of tradition that originated from the divine election of female figures. It is the prologue, then, that will provide the key to a new understanding of the function that the narrative of Mary and Jesus had acquired at the particular stage of the Qur'an's genesis when the sura emerged.

The Text of the Prologue and its Gender-informed Subtext

The prologue of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* starts with an introductory hymn (Q. 3:1–6) that is concerned with revelation (Q. 3:3–4),[9] on the one hand, and with procreation (Q. 3:6), on the other. It thus announces the two major topics of the sura: the multiplicity, and possible ambiguity, of scriptural meanings, and the significance of genealogy. Both issues are perceived as being intertwined. This is clearly related to the religio-political crisis that the sura reflects. In *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, two rival sources of authority are juxtaposed: the established Abrahamic genealogy, represented by a community in possession of the scriptural authority of Jewish tradition, and the newly introduced Christian tradition. Both traditions are listed side by side in Q. 3:33, though not without them creating tension. In order to read the core verse of the following discussion (Q. 3:7) contextually, this newly kindled tension between the two traditions must be kept in mind.

The text starts with a hymnal affirmation of divine oneness (Q. 3:2) and the revelation received by the Prophet that has come down to affirm the truth of what was revealed before, the Torah (*tawrāt*) and the Gospel (*injīl*):

Q. 3:3:

3 *He has sent down upon thee the* [Scripture] *with the truth,*
confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel.

At first glance, Q. 3:1–32 appears to be a conventional debate about revelation and prophethood, and their acceptance by diverse groups. It expounds on the divine origin of the new revelation (the Qur'an), insisting on its compatibility with the earlier scriptures and its confirming power. However, the revealed character has to be defended against some opponents' desire (*ibtighā'*) to exploit the textual ambiguity of particular verses in order to arouse doubts and chaos:

Q. 3:7–8:

7 *It is He who sent down upon thee the [Scripture],*
wherein are verses clear that are the [Mother of the Scripture],
and others ambiguous.
As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part,
desiring dissension [or temptation, seduction],
and desiring its interpretation;
and none knows its interpretation, save only God.
And those firmly rooted in knowledge say,[10]
'We believe in it; all is from our Lord';
yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds.

8 *Our Lord, make not our hearts to swerve after that Thou hast guided us;*
and give us mercy from Thee; Thou art the Giver.

Q. 3:7 is a highly controversial verse among scholars. It has been the subject of numerous debates,[11] since the expression *And those firmly rooted in knowledge* (*wa'l-rāsikhūna fī'l-'ilm*) can be construed as either the end of the sentence preceding it or the beginning of the one following it. According to the latter reading, the prerogative of exegesis would be reserved for God; in the former one, it would be attributed to both God and the learned. In view of the fact that the desire for the interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the ambiguous passages is equated with the desire for dissension, the option in which exegesis is attributed to both God and the learned appears less probable, though the verse may have been intentionally left ambiguous. In Islamic exegesis, the second understanding – that the prerogative of exegesis is for God alone – prevails, but the opposite view is adopted in Shi'ism.

It is obvious that these verses go beyond the frequent Qur'anic remarks about the reluctance of some of its listeners to accept the new revelation. They, for the first time, raise the issue of hermeneutic ambiguity in scripture, which comes as a surprise in view of the numerous previous self-declarations of the Qur'an to be a particularly manifest (*mubīn*) text (see Q. 26:2: *Those are the signs of the Manifest [Scripture], tilka āyātu'l-kitābi'l-mubīn*). Accordingly, why should there be verses that are ambiguous? The problem

remains unresolved as long as the community's ongoing debate with adherents of the older religions is ignored. Q. 3:7 certainly is not an isolated theoretical statement but part of a controversy, since its harsh rebuke of the kind of exegesis practised by unnamed individuals seems to point to a *Sitz im Leben* representing the community's experience with existing exegetical practices.

Ambiguity viewed through the lens of a gendered hermeneutic

Intertexts from post-Biblical traditions indeed loom large in the verses of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*: thus, the identification of different interpretations of scriptural text units is an acknowledged practice in the Jewish reading of the Bible. Jewish tradition, since the Tannaitic period (also known as the Mishnaic period – the period of the first authoritative collection of Jewish oral traditions), distinguishes different 'faces of the Torah' (*panim shel ha-torah*). This exegetical perception of scriptural texts as being liable to more than one understanding, that is, *mutashābih* (ambiguous) rather than *muḥkam* (clear), seems to be reflected in the Qur'anic piece at hand.[12] *Mutashābih* in this understanding would be rendered as 'polysemous'. Another exegetical concept that is reflected in Q. 3:7 is *ta'wīl*, which equally points to exegetical activity and professionalism. Etymologically, *ta'wīl* is an Arabic re-baptism of the Hellenistic idea of *reductio ad primum*, a kind of deduction, obviously a technique which was practised among learned scriptural exegetes at the time of the Qur'an. Finally, the two terms *mutashābih* and *muḥkam* together resound categories of Hellenistic rhetoric, *mutashābih* matching the Aristotelian *amphibolos* while *muḥkam* comes close to its opposite, *pithanos*.[13] The establishment of the antagonism between *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* is thus not limited to a lexical innovation, the introduction of two new terms, but rather forms part of a new rhetorical-philosophical discourse in the Qur'an.

It is interesting to see – and this is certainly not unrelated to the wider context of the female-centred narrative about Mary and Āl 'Imrān – that to discredit, or at least cope with, such a professional exegesis, the text uses a code that was not yet applied in the earlier Qur'anic discussions of revelation. Its imagery strikes the reader as charged with gender associations in contrasting the unbelievers' subversive desire (*ibtighā'*[14]) to bring about dissension (*fitna*, a word that also denotes seduction[15]) through scriptural exegesis with the believers' respectful clinging to the mother text (*umm al-kitāb*). In contrast to the sceptics' 'unchaste' exploitation of the text in search of *fitna*, the believers unquestioningly accept the problematic verses in spite of their hermeneutic ambiguity, immediately reconnecting them to the 'mother of scripture'. The qualification of the core of the scripture as *umm* (mother)

deserves attention, as it conflates two discourses: the masculine, power-informed discourse related to divine revelation (*tanzīl*), on the one hand, and the more submissive female discourse related to maternal conception and reproduction (*waḍʿ*), on the other. This scriptural image of the mother text may, again, be due to the Qur'an's place in a debate. It seems to reflect, albeit not precisely in that way, understandings from Rabbinic scholarship where a reading according to the securely transmitted scriptural text is a reading that has a mother, so to speak, meaning that it is rooted in scripture itself (*yēsh ēm la-miqrā*); this is in contrast to a reading that freely diverges from the canonical shape and merely relies on the transmitted consonantal structure (*yēsh ēm la-masōret*).[16] Very much like the word *umm* (mother) in the Qur'anic expression *umm al-kitāb* (mother text), the Hebrew *ēm* here functions as a warrant of authenticity. The new hermeneutical tool for dealing with scripture exhibiting polysemy, then, would most plausibly have been derived from Jewish circles in Medina.

Whose ambiguity? Accommodating Christology in the Qur'anic vision of scripture

What might have triggered this new perception of the ambiguity of scripture? One could imagine a scenario exclusively confined to the Qur'anic community and its Medinan Jewish interlocutors. Learned Jews might have demonstrated their tools of Biblical interpretation to the Qur'anic community and may also have alerted them to the existence of polysemous terms in the Qur'an, thus potentially undermining the verses' convincing power and possibly causing confusion. The debate, according to this vision, would have been one between the Jews and the Qur'anic community concerning the nature of scripture and the legitimacy of interpretation. Thus, Q. 3:7 would appear to reflect a verdict that would have been used to resolve the ongoing controversy.

This kind of reading of the Qur'an, by isolating individual verses from their context, however, fails to do justice to the rhetorical structure of the sura with its purposeful cross-references. Following a suggestion made by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, another scenario appears equally worth considering. Abu Zayd assumes that the focus of the debate was not the problem of exegetical practice as such, but a particular theological issue perceived as ambiguous, namely, Christology.[17] This interpretation is appealing, not only in view of the centrality of Christian traditions in *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*, but in view of another observation: both the prologue and the narrative of the sura introduce new discourses – one genealogical, the other rhetorical. Q. 3:7 in particular expresses rhetorical principles that fit well with the rhetorically and philosophically informed Christological debates. It is true that the Qur'anic text does not make the

subject of the rhetorical discourse explicit, but one might argue that it is implicit in the structure of the sura. Indeed, looking closer, we find traces of the issue of Christology in the prologue, even before the narrative about the two extraordinary deliveries of Mary and Jesus unfolds.

The gendered image of the *umm al-kitāb* in Q. 3:7 is preluded by the preceding verse's reference to procreation, which anticipates the hermeneutic debate about the *āyāt muḥkamāt* and the *āyāt mutashābihāt: It is He who forms you in the womb as He will. There is no god but He, the All-mighty, the All-wise* (Q. 3:6). While this verse seems at first to be concerned with God's omniscience, it may also be read as a statement about giving birth and motherhood. There is an implicit correspondence between the antagonism of two kinds of scriptural verses and two stages of prenatal development: the fact that, before delivery, God forms the child in his mother's womb, where his/her gender is not yet clearly identifiable (*muḥkam*). Accordingly, the unborn child remains *mutashābih* to human observers, although God Himself is of course knowledgeable about the child's gender and the mother is a warrant of the fact that the child will, in due time, emerge unambiguously as that which it is. The divinely willed fact of this ambiguity is foregrounded in the story of Mary's birth, since her mother is unaware she is carrying a female child and thus pledges her to the temple, to be raised the way a male child destined to become priest would be raised. Moreover, the unborn's nature, in terms of divinity or humanity, is equally known exclusively by God: Jesus' birth is as God wills (*kayfa yashāʾu'llāh*), to say the least, insofar as he was conceived without a father and the problem of his divine/human nature is an ambiguous issue. These observations seem to suggest that the problematic of Christology would have been the subtext of the discourse on the ambiguity of scriptural expression.

This hypothesis is corroborated by the striking presence of gender-specific allusions. The juxtaposition of the anaphoric introductions *It is He who . . .* (*huwa'lladhī*) in Q. 3:6 and 7 with their analogous figures of thought brings about a conflation of the two main discourses of Q. 3:1–62: the discourse of revelation and scriptural meanings, on the one hand, and of procreation and genealogy, on the other. While the former portrays knowledge as something that is vertically handed down (*tanzīl*), the latter puts forward a much more inclusive understanding of knowledge, which is that it inheres in the very nature of creation. It is worth noting that in both the acts of procreation and revelation, God makes use of a female agent, that is, the maternal womb (*raḥm*) for sexual reproduction and the core of scripture, the mother text (*umm al-kitāb*), for revelation.

Since the process of revelation involves a female agent, the mother text, an agent respected by the believers, it is only logical that the aberrant interpretive

acts of the sceptics should be described in gendered terms as well: their desire (*ibtighā'*) for dissension (*fitna*) through interpretation conveys a conspicuous allusion to the female power of seduction (*fitna*), as noted earlier. *Ibtighā'*, in this sense, picks up on, and is reified by, the allusion to an unchaste woman, which is embedded in the language of Q. 19:20: *neither have I been unchaste* (*lam akun baghiyya*) and of Q. 19:28: *nor was thy mother a woman unchaste* (*lam takun ummuki baghiyya*). The hermeneutic treatment of scripture, either respectfully or improperly, is thus coded in terms taken from the world of male responses to women. Taking this gender-oriented subtext into consideration, it is hard not to be reminded of the image of the jealous God, known from the Hebrew Bible, who laments the adulterous leanings of his people.

Byzantine Mary reflected in the Qur'anic texts

More directly, however, the gendered subtext of Q. 3:7 should be viewed in relation to the image of Mary in *Sūrat Maryam*, of which *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* is a re-reading. The text of the prologue proves intimately related to perceptions expressed in Eastern Christianity,[18] where the figure of Mary, as can be seen in the iconography, for example, of the Byzantine mosaics of the Church of Irene in Istanbul (today, Kariye Camii),[19] is regarded not only as the subject of theoretical dispute, but as a representative of the Christian *skandalon* (i.e. the paradox of Christology).[20] It is particularly striking that the issue of a female locus of divine communication is coded in hermeneutic terms similar to those of Q. 3:7 in a central liturgical text of Eastern Christianity, the *Akathistos Hymnos* (the 'Praise of the Virgin') recited during Lent. This text focuses on the hermeneutical function of the Virgin Mary in communicating the divine word – just as the Qur'anic mother text defies the attempts of professional interpreters to decode it, so does Mary render mute the professional practitioners of human communication, the rhetoricians:

> Rhētoras polyphthongous hōs ichthyas aphōnous horomen epi soi, Theotoke. Aporousi gar legein to pōs kai Parthenos meneis kai tekein ischysas. Hēmeis de to mystērion thaumazontes, pistōs boōmen: Chaire, sophias Theou docheion. Chaire, pronoiás autou tameion. Chaire, philosophous asophous deiknyousa. Chaire, technologous alogous elenchousa.
>
> We find the great rhetoricians rendered mute like fish when confronted with you, who gave birth to God. They are unable to spell out how you could give birth remaining a virgin. We, however, admiring the mystery, in belief call out: Rejoice, you who were the receptacle of God's wisdom! Rejoice, treasure of his providence! Rejoice, you who stripped philosophers of their philosophy! Rejoice, you, who made the instructors of speech speechless . . .[21]

Whereas the Virgin Mary is usually portrayed as being maximally endowed with the power of persuasion, one verse of the hymn presents her as an object of controversy, and thus approximates the notion of ambiguity that is so crucial in Q. 3:7. For the believers, Mary constitutes an unambiguous symbol of faith, yet for the unbelievers she functions as a catalyst of disturbance: 'Rejoice, you who are ambiguous for the unbelievers, rejoice, you who personifies the pride of the believers' (*chaire, tón apistón amphibolon akousma, chaire, ton pistón anamphibolon kauchēma*).[22] In this text, which has numerous parallels in the Eastern Church liturgy, it is not the 'mother of scripture' but the 'mother of the incarnate word', Theotokos (Mary's official title since the synod of Ephesus in 431 AD), that is praised as an object of faith for the believers, and ambiguity appears solely before the eyes of the unbelievers. Of course, the two texts and their contexts are very different: in the Christian case, it is the miraculous nature of the virgin birth that calls into doubt the validity of rational discourse, whereas the Qur'anic notion of the mother text is a rather abstract concept. Yet in both cases, the female coding of truth functions as a warrant of authenticity.

Though it is problematic to claim that the Qur'anic text consciously or unconsciously draws on the hymn, there is in both texts a merging of rhetorical and genealogical discourse which is striking. In Eastern Christianity, this double discourse is a chief characteristic of Mary and thus of Christology; in the Qur'an, this merger is reserved for *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, the text par excellence about the Christian Holy Family. One has, of course, to bear the entire theological paradigm in mind to fully appreciate this statement. In fact, the Qur'anic reference to the prominent members of the Christian Holy Family through the reuse of their names (Q. 19:28: *Sister of Aaron, yā ukhta Hārūn*; Q. 3:35: *the wife of* [*Amram*], *imra'at 'Imrān*) is only the tip of the iceberg in a comprehensive theological discourse.[23] This reference to the priestly Aaronid line,[24] implied in Mary's and her mother's names, reflects nothing less than the positioning of the figure of Mary in the interface between Judaism and Christianity. To provide a few clarifying details here: the Qur'anic narrative presents Mary as closely attached to the temple. In Q. 19:16 she is said to have retreated *to an Eastern place*. This can be interpreted as an allusion to the eastern gate of the temple, which, according to the vision of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 43–4), marks the border between the worldly and the eschatological city. Thus, the eastern gate is a place that in the apocryphal gospels (particularly in the Protevangelium of James[25]) as well as in Byzantine iconography,[26] is closely connected to Mary's family history, being the site where her father mysteriously learns about his aged wife's having miraculously become pregnant. The eastern gate of the temple, through which God had moved out of Jerusalem (Ezekiel

43:1–12), leaving the city to destruction, was traditionally considered closed since then. It thus became a symbol of closure. According to Jewish messianic tradition, the gate is expected to be opened only with the coming of the Messiah (Ezekiel 43:4). Christian theologians who adopted this motif – translating topography into physiology – related it to Mary/Christ and transformed Mary, through whose body the Messiah would come forth, into an image of the temple. Going a step further, it is Mary, being a representation of the 'new temple' (i.e. the church), after the 'old temple' had become devoid of its priestly presence – since Zachariah's son John did not take over his father's priestly office but became the 'forerunner' of Christ – who is destined to occupy their place in the core space of the cult. Christology thus replaces priesthood. Mary's sojourn in the temple symbolises the overtaking of religious territory: the Christian church is presented as 'inheriting' the most sacred site of Judaism. These issues, of course, are not made explicit in the Qur'an, and it seems problematic even to assume their implicit presence there. Yet they are alluded to; their traces are re-contextualised in the Qur'anic discourse.

Whatever elements of the Christological discourse we can assume the Qur'anic community to have been aware of,[27] these elements should probably be qualified as being not so much unclear or semantically ambiguous, but downright paradoxical. To come back to our hermeneutic antagonism, what if the opposition between *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* did not denote that which was clear versus that which was ambiguous, but that which was theologically plain versus that which was theologically problematic, even paradoxical? Though the Jewish perception of the different faces of the Torah is not related to the notion of paradox (which seems to be the domain of Christian thinking) it can certainly be subsumed under the category of ambiguity. Further intertextual reading will, however, be needed to ultimately decide that question.

What we can claim with some plausibility is that Jewish traditions about the multiple interpretations of scripture and the connected technical terms of exegesis would have penetrated the horizons of the Qur'anic community through a reflexive process of debate. The appropriation of the Jewish concept of the different faces of scripture resulted in more than an addition to the already existing Qur'anic archive of ideas. It provoked a questioning or even undermining of already achieved positions, primarily the previously held view that scripture was clear and unambiguous. Although Q. 3:7 seems to view the technique of *ta'wīl* rather unfavourably, by acknowledging the existence of *mutashābihāt* and the possibility of clarifying them through exegesis,[28] the community takes notice of a new hermeneutical tool to decode scriptural

speech. Once this new knowledge reached the Qur'anic community, burning controversial issues like that of Christology could be classified in hermeneutical terms and thus be explained, or at least made acceptable. What is perhaps even more momentous is that, from then on, the door was open for the multiplication of Qur'anic readings, one of them being the recognition that divine communication takes not only clear but also ambiguous, even paradoxical, forms.

Relating the Christian experience to the community's present

The Qur'an seems to portray Christian piety as being particularly based on humility, again evoking female rather than male ideals of self-representation:

Q. 3:16–17:

16 *who say, 'Our Lord, we believe; forgive us our sins, and guard us against the chastisement of the Fire' –*

17 *men who are patient, truthful, obedient, expenders in alms, imploring God's pardon at the daybreak.*

Some of these ascetic gestures are demanded of Mary herself in the narrative section, for instance in Q. 3:43. Q. 3:16 is strongly reminiscent of the Lord's Prayer, with its petition 'forgive us our sins . . . and lead us not into temptation' (Luke 11:4, similarly worded in Matthew 6:12–13); the combination of a prayer for forgiveness and a prayer to be spared from punishment is otherwise uncommon in the Qur'an.[29]

The text, however, subsequently refers to the dissent between diverse groups of those who had received scripture before; the true religion could only be proven through submissiveness to God:

Q. 3.19

The true religion with God is Islam [i.e. submission].
Those who were given the [Scripture] *were not at variance*
except after the knowledge came to them,
being insolent one to another (*baghyan baynahum*).
And whoso disbelieves in God's signs, God is swift at the reckoning.

This verse echoes the earlier concluding verses of the Qur'anic presentations of Jesus, insisting on the dissent that broke out after his disappearance (Q. 19:37; see also Q. 43:65).[30] What is novel here is that the dissenters are described in gender-related terms again, being compared to adulterers acting out of envy or impure desire (*baghyan baynahum*), thus alluding to the accusation of Mary being an unchaste woman (Q. 19:28). Again, this is a metaphorical reference to the female social realm that figures prominently in the narrative of the sura.

The destructive desires attested for those who refuse to accept the message is in stark contrast to the attitude assumed by the Prophet, who calls for submissiveness:

Q. 3:20

So if they dispute with thee, say:
'I have surrendered my will to God, and whosoever follows me.
And say to those who have been given the [Scripture]
and to the common folk (ummiyyūn): 'Have you surrendered?'
If they have surrendered, they are right guided;
but if they turn their backs, thine it is only to deliver the Message;
and God sees His servants.

This verse is particularly noteworthy, since it attests not only to the Prophet's challenging the authority of the heirs of scripture, certainly a most powerful group, but to his interaction with the common folk (*ummiyyūn*) who are usually understood as being unfamiliar with scripture. The term was first introduced in the Qur'an in Q. 2:78 to refer to those who are not educated enough to know scripture.[31] However, by the time the verses Q. 3:20 and Q. 3:75 were communicated, the term figured in the neutral sense of 'the unscriptured' (those who were not yet divinely graced with a scripture). This may suggest there was an understanding of *ummī* as an etymological reference to *umm*, 'mother', rather than to *umma*, 'community', which looms behind the use of the term in still later texts when it became a purely positive qualification of the community.[32]

Towards the end of the prologue in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, a verse which is strongly reminiscent of the Magnificat (Mary's hymn from Luke 1:46–55) is uttered by the Prophet, who, in a way not completely dissimilar to Mary's conception of Christ (the word of God incarnated),[33] has been graced with the revelation of the Qur'an via the intervention of an angel:

Q. 3:26

Say: 'O God, Master of the Kingdom,
Thou givest the Kingdom to whom Thou wilt,
and seizest the Kingdom from whom Thou wilt,
Thou exaltest whom Thou wilt,
and Thou abasest whom Thou wilt; in Thy hand is the good;
Thou art powerful over everything.

The revolutionary tone of this hymnal statement from the Magnificat preludes the core message of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*.[34] It is about toppling the predominance of those in power, here the exclusively Abrahamic recipients of revelation, and

elevating another hitherto powerless group, Āl 'Imrān, as legitimate recipients. This group is represented not by patriarchs, but by two female protagonists – Mary and her mother – and one male, who, however, in his apostleship displays submissiveness and remains remote from the association of patriarchal authority – Jesus.[35]

In the prologue to the narrative part of the sura, the tone of the two Christian stories marked by humility vis-à-vis the will of God and steadfastness in belief in spite of rational objections is clearly anticipated. However, there is also great confidence in God's power to change existing power relations and to turn hierarchical structures upside down, as expressed in the Magnificat. This divine power will be unequivocally disclosed in the narrative part of the sura.

The Stories

The core stories known to the listeners from *Sūrat Maryam* are integrated in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Q. 3:33–4) into a genealogical discourse that presupposes a divine project of prophethood to be enacted by a plurality of prophets, no longer labelled individually as *rasūl* (messenger), but collectively, in accordance with the Jewish model of this concept, as *nabiyyūn* or *anbiyā'* (prophets), a counterpart of the Hebrew *nabhī*.[36] The appearance of this concept was presaged in several earlier texts,[37] but gains particular significance in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*. Later on in the Qur'an, it expands to encompass Muhammad (Q. 33:7). It is no mere coincidence that the Gospel of Matthew equally begins with a focus on genealogy, indeed two different genealogies. While the first one mentions David and Abraham as the progenitors of Jesus (Matthew 1:1), the ensuing long one covers a total of three times fourteen generations and includes five female figures (Matthew 1:2–16). Though Matthew's extensive genealogy refers to Joseph, some exegetes took it as implicitly including Mary.[38] It is noteworthy that the Qur'anic story of Jesus' family uses a looser form of genealogy by presenting Adam, Noah, the House of Abraham and the House of Amram as the elects of God and as genealogically related to each other:

Q. 3:33–4:

33 *God chose Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham*
and the House of [Amram] above all beings,
34 *the seed of one another; God hears, and knows.*

Adam and Noah mark the two beginnings of human life on earth; Abraham and his family are God's elect in the Torah, hitherto acknowledged as the uniquely blessed family of prophets. In this text, Amram is identified, through the typological reading of Mary's origins, with Mary's father instead of Joachim

(Amram being referred to since he is the father of Aaron, the founder of the Israelite sacrificial cult which is the predecessor of the Christian cult). For the first time, and only through the agency of his wife, Amram enters the stage as the founder of another elect family, that of the protagonists of the Gospel, Mary and Jesus. Four great epochs are presented then: the first inaugurated by the first man, the second by the survivor of the deluge – both of whom are presented as forefathers of the founders of two later traditions – the third by the patriarchs, starting with Abraham, and the fourth by the family of Mary and Jesus. In the Qur'an, the relationship between Jesus and David is not relevant, as it was in Matthew 1:1, since Jesus is not perceived as the Messiah in the Jewish sense of a reviver of the Jewish monarchic structures, although he bears the name *masīḥ* (literally, Messiah or Christ). It is noteworthy that genealogy is not the exclusive focus of the verse, the four founders of the new generations being first of all elects (*inna llāha ṣṭafā*). Since Zachariah is obviously taken as part of Āl 'Imrān, the two stories of Zachariah and Mary (Q. 19:2–15 and 19:16–23) – which were earlier presented as being connected only through their analogous motifs – have been interwoven to form one joint story, without however partaking in a shared Christological discourse. In accordance with their presentation in *Sūrat Maryam*, they remain functionally isolated from each other.

The wife of Amram

The genealogical relationship among these prophets is expressed by the Qur'anic neologism *dhurriyya* (descendants; literally, 'seed') which seems to echo the Hebrew *zera'* ('seed', first applied to the descendants of Abraham, *zar'akha*, 'your seed', in Genesis 22:17), though it is not etymologically related to it. *Dhurriyya*, until then, had been almost exclusively ascribed to figures of the Hebrew Bible, an exclusiveness that Q. 3:33 appears to call into question through its juxtaposition of Āl Ibrāhīm and Āl 'Imrān. In order to achieve this new equivalent ranking of Āl 'Imrān and Āl Ibrāhīm, the central female protagonist, Mary, is supported by a second and more active figure, her mother, who provides her with a matrilineal genealogy of her own. Together with her mother and her son, and through her loose relation to Zachariah, Mary constitutes the House of Amram which *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* presents for the first and only time as equal in rank with the patriarchal family of Abraham.

The even stronger corroboration of the new ranking of the Holy Family is, however, hidden in Mary's temple-related genealogy. Though both designations Āl Ibrāhīm and Āl 'Imrān are *hapax legomena* in the Qur'an (i.e. they only occur once in the Qur'an), Āl Ibrāhīm, in view of the ubiquitous references to the Israelites and Jews as well as to Abraham in the Medinan suras, is immediately understood; this is less so for Āl 'Imrān, which doesn't have the

same indirect referencing. It is the text of this sura that introduces Āl 'Imrān as being a familial line no less prominent than the venerable Āl Ibrāhīm. The name Āl 'Imrān was long considered to reflect a typology that connects Mary with Miriam (see Q. 19:28: *Sister of Aaron . . .*), the sister of Moses and Aaron, known from Exodus. However, as Mourad has convincingly argued,[39] the connection is not to Miriam but to Aaron, the founding figure of the Israelite priestly cult. Indeed, a number of liturgical texts preserved in the Eastern Church tradition present Mary as belonging to the Aaronid line. This particular relation is – as we saw above – reflected somewhat obliquely in the Qur'an as well where the Holy Family is in various ways related to the Jewish temple tradition.

The story of Mary's unnamed mother who vows to consecrate her child to the service of God, based on the events that are related in the Protevangelium of James, is strikingly explicit in its gender-specific physical detailing – *within my womb* (*fī baṭnī*, Q. 3:35), *I have given birth* (*waḍa'tu*, Q. 3:36), *she gave birth* (*waḍa'at*, Q. 3:36), *a female* (*unthā*, Q. 3:36). The woman speaks uninhibitedly about her physical condition and at the same time proves perfectly at home with the language required to address God. Having borne a daughter instead of the expected son, she remains determined to fulfil her vow. She herself names the child Maryam (Mary),[40] the role of the father being sidelined in the story, and hands her over to the temple, asking God to protect the child and her future offspring. It is certainly significant that the Qur'anic version, in contrast to the Protevangelium, leaves the paternal role unoccupied. It is God Himself who accommodates Mary in the temple, in spite of her gender. Only then does Zachariah, who is completely absent from Mary's story in the Protevangelium, enter the stage. He has been put in charge of Mary (Q. 3:37); his care, however, turns out to be unnecessary, since Mary is provided for with heavenly food. Thus, even the one male admitted to the scene proves to be superfluous – patriarchal categories of social dominance are discarded. An allusion to Mary's betrothal to a man could be read in Q. 3:44; yet the information is glossed over immediately, as if the detail was unwelcome within the story of the virgin. Until the appearance of Jesus, the active members of Āl 'Imrān are all women:

Q. 3:35–7:

35 *When the wife of* [*Amram*] *said,*
'Lord, I have vowed to Thee, in dedication, what is within my womb.
Receive Thou this from me; Thou hearest, and knowest.'

36 *And when she gave birth to her she said,*
'Lord, I have given birth to her, a female.'
(And God knew very well what she had given birth to;
the male is not as the female.)

'And I have named her Mary, and commend her to Thee with her seed,
to protect them from the accursed Satan.'
37 *Her Lord received the child with gracious favour,*
and by His goodness she grew up comely, Zachariah taking charge of her.
Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the Sanctuary,
he found her provisioned.
'Mary,' he said, 'how comes this to thee?'
'From God,' she said.
Truly God provisions whomsoever He will without reckoning.

Zachariah

As in the Gospel of Luke, Mary's story alternates with Zachariah's.[41] His short account remains similar to the story from *Sūrat Maryam*; it is, indeed, a summary of the former which serves to connect the events around Mary and Zachariah. There are a few specifications however: the account now underscores his wish for offspring (*dhurriyya*), for a child to perpetuate his family, not just for an undetermined heir (*walī*) as a successor in the priestly office. This time it is not God (who seems to be the speaker in the earlier story) but the angels who approach Zachariah when he is praying in the temple in his priestly function. They predict the birth of a son called Yaḥyā (John), adding to the already known attributes of John that of a lord and an ascetic (*ḥāṣūr*). This last characteristic should not go unnoticed. It implies that a momentous historical development had occurred, and has to be assumed to be the subtext of the narrative in the Christian tradition: John's destiny as an ascetic and not a priest signals the end of the temple history and its replacement with the Christian church history.

The story proceeds as it did in *Sūrat Maryam*: Zachariah, unprepared to believe the promise, asks for a sign and is ordered to remain mute, and to advise the community to praise God in the morning and in the evening. The story that now indirectly provides a temple background for the narrative of Mary, ends with the prediction of the birth of a son whose fulfilment is already known to the listeners.

Q. 3:38–41

38 *Then Zachariah prayed to his Lord saying,*
'Lord, give me of Thy goodness a goodly offspring.
Yea, Thou hearest prayer.'
39 *And the angels called to him, standing in the Sanctuary at worship,*
'Lo, God gives thee good tidings of John, who shall confirm a Word of God,
a chief, and chaste (ḥāṣūr), a Prophet, righteous.'

40 *'Lord,' said Zachariah, 'how shall I have a son,*
seeing I am an old man and my wife is barren?'
'Even so,' God said, 'God does what He will.'
41 *'Lord,' said Zachariah, 'appoint to me a sign.'*
'Thy sign,' God said, 'is that thou shalt not speak,
save by tokens, to men for three days.
And mention thy Lord oft, and give glory at evening and dawn.'

Mary

Mary's story in *Sūrat Maryam* had been strongly imprinted with mythical traits. In *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*, however, Mary re-enters history. She is placed into an environment occupied by a number of other people; her account thus loses the character of a mythical story. Still, she remains passive, figuring as a receiver of messages rather than an interlocutor.

Q. 3:42–7

42 *And when the angels said, 'Mary, God has chosen thee,*
and purified thee; He has chosen thee above all women.
43 *Mary; be obedient to thy Lord, prostrating and bowing before Him.'*
44 *(That is of the tidings of the Unseen, that We reveal to thee;*
for thou wast not with them, when they were casting quills
which of them should have charge of Mary;
thou wast not with them, when they were disputing.)
45 *When the angels said, 'Mary, God gives thee good tidings*
of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary;
high honoured shall he be in this world and the next, near stationed to God.
46 *He shall speak to men in the cradle, and of age, and righteous he shall be.'*
47 *'Lord,' said Mary, 'how shall I have a son*
seeing no mortal has touched me?'
'Even so,' God said, God creates what He will.
When He decrees a thing He does but say to it "Be," and it is.

Mary's story is reduced again to its traditional elements: angels address her, first announcing her divine election. She has been purified and is praised as being the chosen among all women, as in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:42).[42] She is called to worship God piously, like the unnamed Christian worshippers mentioned in the prologue (Q. 3:17). Mary again utters doubts, this time not addressing the angel but God; she receives the same answer as before: God's word has the power to create. Again Mary's concern with her virginity is underscored. The election scene merges with a reminder – addressed to

Muhammad – of the mysterious character (*ghayb*) of the accounts; these transcend human experience, having been divinely revealed.[43] The proclaimer, therefore, has no access to the details of all the events. This is why some episodes (for example, the casting of lots by the high priest to ascertain the appropriate guardian and husband for Mary[44]) are not included in the narrative. The silence around this particular detail fits well with the Qur'anic image of Mary who is nowhere presented as a mature married woman, but features exclusively as a young virgin. The story goes on to mention the annunciation of the birth of Jesus, who now bears his full name and title al-Masīḥ ʿĪsā b. Maryam (the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, Q. 3:45). It is predicted that he will hold an elevated rank in this world and the next, to enjoy a closeness to God which, until the delivery of *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*, was characteristic only of Moses in the Qur'an. Jesus' presentation is devoid of divine attributes. The Qur'an at this point remains silent about Christian dogmas, neither engaging with nor dissociating itself from the various positions held by Christians. Mary's reluctance to accept the good tidings only serves to provoke the verdict that God is omnipotent and creates by a mere verbal imperative (a point already familiar to the audience from Q. 19:35). The story, though clearly a recapitulation of the earlier one in *Sūrat Maryam*, does clarify some background details, such as Mary's upbringing in the temple and Zachariah's guardianship of her. The narrative detail of her being served food by angels in the Protevangelium is de-mythified as well: it is God's provisions that she enjoys (Q. 3:37). The text, however, does not integrate the information about her betrothal (Q. 3:44) which is addressed only indirectly, in a metatextual comment, and hence appears to be repressed. The Medinan version primarily serves to reduce the earlier introduced mythic images to more general and abstract ideas: instead of the spirit turned visible as a man (Q. 19:17), it is a host of angels (presumably invisible) who speak to Mary (Q. 3:42); in Zachariah's case (Q. 3:39), they even replace God as speaker (Q. 19:7, 9). Most striking, however, is the dismissal of the mythical scenario surrounding the story of Jesus' birth, which is omitted from the text altogether. The entire account is no longer miraculous. It is all the more surprising to find Mary elevated, in this text, to a unique rank in which she is superior to all women. She is placed above all other Qur'anic female figures, is integrated into a prophetic genealogy – which in her case is made up primarily of women – and even has the history related to her birth and education recorded.

In this later version, the core verse of Mary's story in the Gospel (Luke 1:27–42), her election and her superiority to all women, is done full justice. It should be kept in mind that this particular benediction of Mary and the Magnificat form important parts of Christian liturgical lore. The latter text is extant, at

least in part, in the Qur'anic context as well, though it is transferred from Mary to the proclaimer, Muhammad (Q. 3:26), as indicated earlier. If we further take into account the allusions found in the prologue of *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* to Christian liturgical and ascetic practices, we may assume that an intense contact between the nascent Muslim community and the liturgically versed adherents of the Christian tradition had preceded the composition of the sura.

Jesus

Q. 3:48–51:

48 *'And He will teach him the [Scripture], the Wisdom, the Torah, the Gospel,*
49 *to be a Messenger to the Children of Israel saying,*
"I have come to you with a sign from your Lord.
I will create for you out of clay as the likeness of a bird;
then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by the leave of God.
I will also heal the blind and the leper,
and bring to life the dead, by the leave of God.
I will inform you too of what things you eat,
and what you treasure up in your houses.
Surely in that is a sign for you, if you are believers.
50 *Likewise confirming the truth of the Torah that is before me,*
and to make lawful to you certain things that before were forbidden unto you. I have come to you with a sign from your Lord;
so fear you God, and obey you me.
51 *Surely God is my Lord and your Lord; so serve Him.*
This is a straight path".'

The account of Jesus in *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* is closely linked to the divine verdict pronounced in response to Mary's questioning of how she could give birth while still a virgin.[45] God, speaking in the third person, announces that He will create Jesus in the same supernatural way that he created Adam, and teach him the scripture – the relationship between scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel remaining undetermined – and dispatch him as a messenger to the Israelites. Jesus' deeds, serving to prove his divinely imposed task, are a series of miracles that he reports about himself. With God's permission, he blows life into clay figurines (Q. 3:49) – a playful miracle known from the Gospel of Infancy which associates the act with the infant rather than the adult Jesus; it fits well with his miraculous defence of his mother while still an infant. He has further come to heal the sick (Q. 3:49), a caring and curing act

that could be equally imagined as the characteristic task of a woman, though his reviving the dead qualifies him as a divinely authorised powerful agent. His miraculous prediction of the details of people's daily life (Q. 3:49), concerning their consuming and storing of food in their houses, however, would associate him again with the female sphere of life (i.e. the household). It is noteworthy that when it comes to his task of implementing the traditional laws, he does not act as a legislator enforcing authority but as the reverse: though he is sent to affirm the Torah he will also abrogate some of its interdictions (Q. 3:50), thus weakening the authority of scripture. His conciliatory call for the worship of God alone (Q. 3:51), a repetition of his speech in *Sūrat Maryam* (Q. 19:36) and *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (Q. 43:64), may be considered Jesus' Qur'anic 'motto'. Jesus, a humble and submissive protagonist of the story, thus appears to represent the other side of patriarchal power.

The catalogue of Jesus' self-reported deeds turns into a story only at Q. 3:52. Viewing Q. 3:49–51 and Q. 3:52–5 synoptically, we rediscover a pattern present in the prophetic stories of earlier suras, though decisively modified. Unlike other prophets, Jesus works miracles and modifies the existing law, but just as much as the previous prophets, he encounters the stubborn unbelief of his people:

Q. 3:52–60:

52 *And when Jesus perceived their unbelief, he said,*
'Who will be my helpers unto God?' The Apostles said,
'We will be helpers of God; we believe in God; witness thou our submission.
53 *Lord, we believe in that Thou hast sent down, and we follow the Messenger.*
Inscribe us therefore with those who bear witness.'
54 *And they devised, and God devised, and God is the best of devisers.*
55 *When God said, 'Jesus, I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me and I will purify thee of those who believe not.*
I will set thy followers above the unbelievers till the Resurrection Day.
Then unto Me shall you return, and I will decide between you,
as to what you were at variance on.
56 *As for the unbelievers, I will chastise them with a terrible chastisement in this world and the next; they shall have no helpers.'*
57 *But as for the believers, who do deeds of righteousness,*
He will pay them in full their wages: and God loves not the evildoers.
58 *This We recite to thee of signs and wise remembrance.*
59 *Truly, the likeness of Jesus, in God's sight, is as Adam's likeness; He created him of dust, then said He unto him, 'Be,' and he was.*
60 *The truth is of God; be not of the doubters.*

Instead of seeking refuge in God, however, as the Qur'an reports of earlier prophets, Jesus calls on helpers (*anṣār*) to support his divine mission. A group of the disciples (*ḥawāriyyūn*) volunteer to become his *anṣār*, subscribing to the new faith of submissiveness. The term *anṣār* may be derived from the experience of Muhammad himself, who brought with him followers, labelled *anṣār*, when he migrated from Mecca to Medina. In spite of the *anṣār*'s commitment, however, it is implicitly understood that Jesus' mission fails. The allusion to a ruse enacted by a non-specified group and another ruse enacted by God in response (Q. 3:54) remains obscure. In the end, God releases Jesus, raising him to heaven through divine intervention (Q. 3.55), and promises to grant his followers a station above that of their adversaries. The event of Jesus' elevation to heaven, which is not expounded in a narrative in the Qur'an but merely announced by God to Jesus, is, again, presented as devoid of any polemical implication. There is no reference to the substantially different Christian tradition about the end of Jesus' worldly life, the crucifixion not being mentioned in this text at all. The entire section on Jesus in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* appears as a loose collection of isolated reports about his life that are occasionally interrupted by addresses to Muhammad's opponents. Its penultimate verse (Q. 3:59) reaffirms the analogy between Jesus and Adam, who were both created by God through the mere creational imperative *kun fa-yakūn* (*'Be' and it is*); the earlier polemic against the assumption of Jesus as the offspring of God is not resumed here. The narrative section concludes with the confirmation that it is a true story (i.e. a revelation), which merges into a hymnal praise of God, who is evoked by his attributes of omnipotence and omniscience:[46]

Q. 3:62:

62 *This is the true story. There is no god but God,*
and assuredly God is the All-mighty, the All-wise.

The story is followed by a long sermon that addresses the people of scripture, the *ahl al-kitāb*, a new designation for those opponents who were, until then, referred to as 'those who were given the scripture'. The new designation, which was to become the technical term to denote both Jews and Christians, points to a later origin of the text following the narrative section that, therefore, would deserve a separate discussion.

Conclusion

What is striking about the extended story of Mary and Jesus in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* is the politicisation of an earlier narrative that was purely didactic and edifying. Mary's story is retold to support a female-dominated genealogy

of elects; in it, she is staged as one of two women that entertain a particularly close relationship with the divine. For this purpose, the earlier introduced relation to Aaron, the founder of the sacrificial worship, is extended. What is now the focus is not only the pedigree of Mary but the construction of an entire sacred tradition, that of the Holy Family, the founders of Christianity. They are named after the father of Aaron, the founder of the sacrificial cult, Amram. Āl ʿImrān is a construction wide enough to encompass the entire family of figures related, in one way or another, to the temple: Mary, who grows up in the temple, Mary's mother who dedicates her to the temple and Zachariah who serves in the temple. It is a concept which appears only in *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*, introduced for a particular purpose: to counterbalance what had, until then, been the only acknowledged prophetic genealogy, namely, that originating in Abraham, Āl Ibrāhīm, with the newly introduced Āl ʿImrān. To embark on this theological venture, the stories of Mary and Jesus had to be stripped of their Christological implications, which, from the perspective of the strictly monotheistic community, would not have been acceptable.

Again, we notice that the joint narration of the two stories of Mary and Zachariah is devoid of any Christological charge. Although both narratives are interwoven, they are connected to each other only through the shared setting of the temple and the presence of Zachariah in both. There is nothing said about an all-embracing plan of salvation, a *Heilsplan*, to be staged through the interaction of the story's protagonists.

Yet, it is not only Mary but her entire family and less close relations, Āl ʿImrān, who are raised to a new rank in order to constitute a counter-tradition to the patriarchal family of Abraham. This goal would have been unattainable in isolation from their unique Aaronid pedigree, their relation to the temple – to whatever degree this relation may have been theologically reflected in the Qur'an. The goal is reached thanks to a novel exegetical concept that had not played a role in the text before *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*: the acknowledgment of the phenomenon of polysemy, even ambiguity, in scripture. The stories about the Christian founding mothers are characterised by rationally incomprehensible features: Mary's giving birth as a virgin, her mother's dedication of her unborn child to the temple and her clinging to her vow even after learning about the child's female gender. These issues – though not related to linguistic anomalies but constituting narrative paradoxes – demanded a new, conceptually extended, understanding of the language of scripture. It is their prominence in *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* that seems to have been the trigger of the unexpected concession that scriptural assertions need not necessarily be free of ambiguity, but may be oscillating and even entail paradox.

The discovery of varying degrees of intelligibility in scripture is nothing new in late antique exegesis; it was prominent in Jewish exegetical practice and accepted in the Christian tradition as well. The Qur'anic statement may well have been inspired by the notion of the multifaceted nature of scripture that the Jewish community in Medina would have been familiar with. The concept of the multiple faces of the Torah may thus have laid the groundwork upon which the phenomenon of ambiguity and even paradox in scripture became acceptable. Although the emotional inclination of the community when *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* was formulated may have been towards the House of Amram, the hermeneutical argument demanded to accommodate them in the Qur'an's theological scope was provided by the intellectual legacy – predominantly found in professional exegetical activity – that was appropriated from the learned members of the House of Abraham.

NOTES

1 See chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary'.
2 For another case study dealing with the Medinan re-reading of a Meccan text, see chapter 11, 'Oral Scriptures'.
3 David Marshall, 'Christianity in the Qur'ān', in Lloyd Ridgeon, ed., *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (Richmond, 1999), pp. 12–13.
4 See Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, pp. 189–94.
5 Zahniser, 'The Word of God'.
6 See Roberto Tottoli, "Imrān', *EQ*, vol. II, p. 509. Tottoli erroneously regards the attribution of Mary and Jesus to the family of 'Imrān as a 'confusion [caused by] a Christian tendency to utilise earlier Biblical figures as "types" for later ones'.
7 For the Medinan Jews, see Moshe Gil, 'The Origins of the Jews of Yathrib', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), pp. 203–24; see also Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, pp. 193–220; and, more recently, Michael Lecker, *Jews and Arabs in Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia* (Aldershot, 1998); idem, *Muslims, Jews and Pagans*.
8 To my knowledge, Sells, in his 'A Literary Approach', was the first to investigate the female subtexts of the Qur'anic texts. However, he does not attempt to trace the development of gender issues throughout the suras. Feminist readings of the Qur'an are still in their infancy; they are less interested in the gender aspects of the text than in the text's reformist potential; see Margot Badran, 'Feminism and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 199–203.
9 The reference to the Gospel (*al-injīl*) here is unusual in that it is never mentioned in the other introductory sections of the Qur'anic suras. It appears twelve times in the Qur'an, exclusively in Medinan verses, always within the context of Qur'anic debates, except in this sura, *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*. The Gospel is most frequently mentioned in conjunction with the Torah (see Q. 5:66, Q. 5:68, Q. 5:110) and it appears twice alongside the Torah and the Qur'an (see Q. 3:3, Q. 9:111). See Griffith ('Gospel'), who, however, does not attempt to locate the Gospel as part of the Qur'anic discourse about revelation within the process of the genesis of the Qur'an.
10 This may alternatively be rendered as: '*and none knows its interpretation, save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say*: . . . '
11 Concerning the grammatical structure, see Claude Gilliot, 'Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval', in *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 99–124, particularly pp. 99–100. Jane Dammen McAuliffe ('Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 as a Point of Intersection', in Boullata, *Literary Structures*,

pp. 56–76) discusses the Islamic exegetical positions. For the hermeneutic implications of the verse, see Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, and Uri Rubin's response in Review of *The Qur'ān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, by Daniel Madigan, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 (2003), pp. 381–6. Other scholars have underscored the striking Qur'anic self-referentiality attested in the text, see Stefan Wild, 'The Self-Referentiality of the Qur'ān: Sūra 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry Walfish and Joseph Goering, eds., *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 422–36.

12 In my view, the perception of the existence of equivocations in Qur'anic verses, so prominent in Jewish tradition with its concept of the 'faces of the Torah' (*pānīm shel ha-tōrāh*) did not originate, as Gilliot ('Exegesis of the Qur'ān') holds, only in early exegesis, but seems to be reflected in the Qur'an itself.

13 Hermann Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* (Berlin, 1870).

14 Though *ibtighā'* in the Qur'an is mostly oriented towards spiritual targets, such as the face of God or His approval, it may also denote less noble desires of worldly things as, for example, in Q. 13:17. Thus, the sense of *ibtighā'* as having a sexual connotation in the Qur'an is not altogether unlikely, especially considering that the Qur'anic word for an unchaste woman, which was used in the narrative of Mary in Q. 19:20, 28, is from the same root *b-gh-y*.

15 In view of the fact that the objects of *ibtighā'* are usually spiritual, its appearance in conjunction with *fitna* appears particularly subversive. In the Qur'an, *fitna* often refers to a divine strategy to test human belief. Now, an agent of *fitna* par excellence, though not explicitly figuring as such in the Qur'an, is woman – see the hadith 'There is no seduction I left behind more harmful for man than woman' (*mā taraktu ba'dī fitnatan aḍarra 'alā'l-rijāli mina'l-nisā'*); Arent J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, vol. V, p. 63 cited in Walid Saleh, 'The Woman as a Locus of Apocalyptic Anxiety', in Angelika Neuwirth *et al.*, *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures*, p. 128. Arberry's translation of *fitna* as dissension obscures its gender implications.

16 See the *Babylonian Talmud* (b. Sukka 6b and elsewhere) and the discussion in Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur*, vol. I, *Die Bibelexegetische Terminologie der Tannaiten* (Leipzig, 1899; repr., Hildesheim, 1990), pp. 119–20. (I owe these references to Dirk Hartwig.) Horovitz (*Koranische Untersuchungen*, p. 65) unjustifiably rejects these Jewish intertexts and argues that they do not fit the Meccan use of *umm al-kitāb*.

17 Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, 'Canonicity and Authenticity: The Power of Discourse', keynote lecture presented at the Summer Academy: 'Literary and Historical Approaches to the Bible and the Qur'an', Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Istanbul, September 2007. Abu Zayd's interpretation relies on *sīra* data involving the Christians of Najran who, according to Islamic tradition, are the addressees in Q. 3:63. My approach to this sura, however, tries to dispense with data from the Islamic tradition.

18 There are some textual parallels in Christian writings. The observation of ambiguity or obscurity of passages in St Paul's letters is conceded in 2 Peter 3:15–16: 'our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some [obscure passages, *dysnoēta tina*], which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.' Wild (*Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān*, p. 18), who adduces this text – that was first brought to his attention by Nicolai Sinai – comments: 'This passage resembles sura 3:7 in which the Qur'ān states that it contains "clear" and "ambiguous" verses, and that only those in "whose mind is swerving" seek out the ambiguous verses to incite strife in the community.' Though there is similarity to the Qur'anic statement, there are important differences: 2 Peter 3:15–16 does not establish an antagonism between clear

verses and ambiguous verses to be classified as the two basic kinds of scriptural verses. The term *dysnoētos* furthermore denotes less polysemy than obscurity. The statement in 2 Peter 3:15–16, rather than establishing a noetic category of ambiguity, is speaking about a shortcoming in St Paul's arguments. Nor does the text refer to any theologically ambiguous issue that might have called for a re-discussion in the Qur'anic community. In view of the momentousness of polysemy in Jewish exegesis, I would prefer to connect the identification of the issue of *mutashābih* to the exegetical category of *pānīm shel ha-tōrāh*. This does not, however, weaken the possibility that it had been the issue of Christian theology that made the community particularly sensitive to ambiguity in scriptural expression.

19 See Robert G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul* (Washington, DC, 1987).

20 Eloquently expressed by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:23. *Skandalon* may be translated as 'a scandal in the eyes of the Jews, and foolishness in the eyes of the Greeks' or, in the less expressive version of the King James Bible, as 'unto the Jews a stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness'.

21 The rather literal translation is my own. For the Greek version, see Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, 3rd stasis, p. 62.

22 Ibid., p. 62.

23 I am basing this comment on a number of passages from Syriac texts (among them, the hymns of St Ephrem) which have been identified as Qur'anic intertexts by Yousef Kouriyhe; see Marx, 'Glimpses of a Mariology'.

24 Aaron and his family, in juxtaposition to Mary, figure prominently in the Mosaic programme of the Kariye Camii, see Ousterhout, *Kariye Camii*.

25 The text of the Protevangelium is found in Hock, *Infancy Gospels*.

26 The iconography can be found in the Kariye Camii; see Ousterhout, *Kariye Camii*, p. 36. Though the mosaics date from only the thirteenth century, they may be considered representative of earlier Byzantine theology.

27 See chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary'.

28 *Mutashābih* is used elsewhere in the Qur'an in the context of scripture with a different, exclusively positive connotation, to mean 'similar to each other'; see the late Meccan verse Q. 39:23, and see also Leah Kinberg, '"*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt*" (Koran 3/7): Implications of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis', *Arabica* 35 (1988), pp. 143–72. Such an intra-Qur'anic shift in meaning is, however, not unique.

29 It is, however, foreshadowed in Q. 40:7 where the angels ask God to forgive the believers and to spare them the punishment of Hell. The prayer for forgiveness appears again in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (Q. 3:147, Q. 3:193). The concept of an overall forgiving of sins seems to go back to *Sūrat Ghāfir*.

30 See chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary'.

31 Q. 2:78 is a polemic targeting individual Jews who were not educated enough to be truly familiar with scripture; the Qur'an thus employs the polemical tools of the adversary group itself. Formally, the word *ummī* linguistically could be the *nisba* of *umm* (mother) as well as of *umma* (community). Historically viewed, however, the word is a Hebrew–Arabic calque which was coined to counter the Jewish allegation of being 'gentile', 'heathen'; see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 649–52 and Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, pp. 52–3.

32 In later texts, this qualification of *ummī* was based on the new image of the Prophet as *al-nabī al-ummī*, 'the Prophet of the common folk' or the 'pagan Prophet'; see Q. 62:2: *it is He who has raised up from among the common people* [or more precisely: from among the pagans] *a Messenger from among them* (*huwa'lladhī ba'atha fī'l-ummiyyīna rasūlan minhum*). This view is introduced in the Medinan addition to *Sūrat al-A'rāf* (Q. 7:157–8). See also chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.

33 For a juxtaposition of the incarnation and Qur'anic revelation, see chapter 1, *'Neither of the East nor of the West'*.

34 David Flusser has shown that the revolutionary tenor of the Magnificat goes back to a Maccabean revolutionary anthem; see Flusser, 'The 'Magnificat'.

35 Though Jesus is a male figure, in his apostleship he displays submissiveness and remains remote from the association of patriarchal authority. He might thus be perceived as somewhat feminised in the Qur'an.

36 On this concept, see Bobzin, 'Seal of the Prophets'.

37 See Q. 42:13, Q. 6:85 for the Meccan suras; these texts connect a series of prophets without, however, relating them genealogically. A Medinan insertion of a genealogy in *Sūrat Maryam* encompasses all the prophets that had been recalled in the sura, namely, Adam, Noah, Abraham and Amram (Q. 19:58: *These are they whom God has blessed among the Prophets of the seed of Adam, and of those We bore with Noah, and of the seed of Abraham and Israel, and of those We guided and chose. When the signs of the All-merciful were recited to them, they fell down prostrate, weeping, ulā'ika'lladhīna an'ama'llāhu 'alayhim mina'l-nabiyyīna min dhurriyyati Ādama wa min man ḥamalnā ma'a Nūḥin wa min dhurriyyati Ibrāhīma wa Isrā'īla wa min man hadaynā wa-jtabaynā idhā tutlā 'alayhim 'ayātu'l-raḥmāni kharrū sujjadan wa bukiyyā*). This text appears to be an attempt to classify a number of prophets under particular genealogical clusters that had been introduced in Q. 3:33; the last group obviously reflects the Christian tradition characterised by humility. Here, the explicit reference to Āl 'Imrān is replaced by a paraphrase characteristic of Christian attitudes.

38 This is stressed by John Chrysostom; see Chrysostom, *Sharḥ Injīl Mattā li'l-qiddīs Yuḥannā'l-dhahabī'l-fam*, tr. Adnan Tarabulsi as *Commentary of the Gospel of St Matthew by St John Chrysostom*, (n.p., 1996, 1998, 2004), I, pp. 52–4.

39 Suleiman Mourad, 'On the Qur'anic Stories about Mary and Jesus', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 1 (1999), pp. 13–24.

40 Ilana Pardes has underscored the significance of women's initiative in naming their children in various Biblical accounts; see Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).

41 For details about the relationship between the Gospel and the Qur'anic account, see chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary'.

42 For the reading of this benediction (which is uttered by Mary's relative, Elizabeth, not an angel, in the Gospel) in Qur'anic exegesis, see McAuliffe, 'Chosen of all Women'.

43 This is a characteristic trait of Qur'anic storytelling. The presence of the teller in the story and the underscoring of his own limited knowledge as a narrator sound very modern. The Qur'an, indeed, stresses that reality is not entirely reproducible through what is explicit, there being a hidden subtext to the explicit word. The Qur'anic text is presented as composed of signs that have to be properly de-coded.

44 The episode of the casting of the lots in the Protevangelium explains why Joseph has been betrothed to Mary.

45 For its precursor in *Sūrat Maryam*, see chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary'.

46 Q. 3:61 is not included here, as it is usually considered a later addition.

14

Myths and Legends in the Qur'an? An Itinerary through its Narrative Landscape*

ARE THERE myths and legends in the Qur'an? Myths are narratives that serve to explain and describe the experienced world by laying bare its archetypal patterns; they are often staged in a cosmic or supernatural framework so as to manifest binding truths, to generate meaning and provide guidance. Legends, raising no such universal claim, may be understood as narratives of pious imagination celebrating an exemplary figure or groups of figures. In view of the fictitious dimension of the genres, even today, the idea of the existence of myths and legends in the Qur'an is controversial. The term 'myth' in particular, is sometimes thought to be irreconcilable with the concept of revelation. Jaroslav Stetkevych, who regards this particular sensitivity as inherent in the Qur'anic discourse itself, argues:

> Within the premises of [the] Arabian stance – begun with the Qur'ān's instant, and almost total, doctrinal impact – Arabic cultural history with all its anthropological constructs, was supposed to have begun and thereafter forever to unfold in the clarity of broad daylight, as it were. All 'falsehood' and all 'truth' were forever absolutely differentiated into some timeless pre-revelation (the age of the Jāhilīyah) that was followed by an equally timeless revelation (the Qur'ān), that is, into that which exists not and that which exists: *al-bāṭil* and *al-ḥaqq*.[1]

It is true that the two terms, myth/legend and revelation, once taken as indicators of different degrees of truth emanating from sources of unequal credibility, become mutually exclusive: myths, under such a perspective, cannot be easily accepted as powerful expressions of significant human experience deemed worthy of transmittal to later generations because of their archetypal evidence and universal validity, but are, rather, suspected

* Previously published in a slightly different form as 'Myths and Legends in the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. III, pp. 477–97; also available on Brill Online. Reprinted by kind permission of the publisher.

of representing deviance and wilful ignorance (*jāhiliyya*). We will try, however, to demonstrate that this verdict needs to be taken with reservations.

First of all, it is important to note that the concepts of myths and legends cover not only ancient pagan narratives, but have been redirected as terms to denote narratives informed with a particular hermeneutic code. It is their intrinsic ability to recall archetypal patterns of interaction that invites the listener to identify with or find guidance through particular figures. Myth and legend, understood as hermeneutically distinguished genres of narrative, are to be found in all kinds of literature, irrespective of their profane or sacred character. As diverse studies in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament alike have shown,[2] mythic and legendary narratives figure amply in the two older monotheistic scriptures. Their immanent mythopoiesis (i.e. their creative power to endow ordinary events with a universal meaning) provides narrative texts with significant subtexts that add surplus meaning to the plot, thus proving not only effective with pre-revelation audiences, but also particularly fit to serve the aims of revelation itself.

Although this chapter focuses on the Qur'an, it will be necessary to survey particular aspects of the discourse in the broader framework of scripture in general. Not only does the Qur'an typologically represent a manifestation of monotheistic scripture, and thus partake in the hermeneutical characteristics of a scriptural canon, the Qur'an also displays, even more perspicuously than the two other scriptures, the process of the emergence of a scripture. If this is true, a comparison between the treatment of myth(s) and legends in the Qur'an, on the one hand, and in the two other monotheistic scriptures, on the other, promises to throw light on the particular developments of the Qur'an. Subsequently, an attempt at a typology of myths and legends in the Qur'an will be undertaken through consideration of a selection of significant cases. Since the Qur'anic narrative is often inconsistent (that is, sophisticated structures appear alongside fragmented panels of mythic images), it is important to discuss not only complete narrative units but overall mythical visions lurking under dispersed single elements. As against the positive evidence of mythopoiesis in the Qur'an, the anti-mythic tendencies, which likewise exist, will also be considered. These points will be exemplified through the discussion of the following issues: myths of history, reflections of myth and mythopoiesis in the Qur'an, power and violence, transgression of boundaries, love and sexuality, and fates of the hero. The discussion will be preceded by a few principal observations concerning the relation between scripture and myth, and the Qur'an vis-à-vis history.

Scripture and Myth

Scripture as a medium of the de-mythification of the world

Myth, in the narrow sense of a narrative about personified or demonised supernatural powers working in individual or collective human life, is, of course, incompatible with the scriptural concept of one exclusive divine agent in nature and history. In fact, scripture has been credited as the medium of de-mythification par excellence. It has been noted of the three monotheistic religions that their scriptures do not, in the way mythic thinking does, refer back to an archaic sacred order, anchored in a primordial beginning that needs to be restored, but refer to events that themselves are part of an extended nexus of happenings. This is particularly true for Christianity and Islam, two religions that are based on events that are understandable only in view of what preceded them: neither initiates traditions but, rather, presupposes them. It is noticeable that in both religions, human history receives a new evaluation through their central event that necessarily judges the preceding era to be of inferior quality and that promises to have an imprint on all further history. Thus, the basic structure of past, present and future cannot be viewed in a symmetrical way since the theological evaluations are unequal.[3] Most importantly, in the Qur'an as much as in the Bible, the assumption of a mythic divine presence focuses on the word of God:

> Thus, Abraham is not present in his progeny due to their physically originating from him but due to the word he received . . . It is through the word that God is present in man . . . This word always is doublefold [in meaning], being at once promise and demand, good tidings and law. Mythic divine presence . . . becomes efficient only when ethical imperatives are taken seriously.[4]

The fact that scripture dissolves pre-monotheistic, iterative or circular patterns of memory, that it tends to historicise memory, becomes most evident from its reinterpretation of the myth-imprinted pagan world submitted to ever repeating cyclical processes of seasonal change. In contrast, the scriptural world view reflects the process of an evolution in linear time. Monotheistic scripture marginalises cosmic experience (e.g. the impact of the powers of nature as manifest in the seasonal cycle) in favour of historical experience (e.g. presenting decisive communal events as unique manifestations of divine power). Scripturally institutionalised feasts thus no longer serve to mark the yearly changes of seasons, but commemorate outstanding events worked by the divine agent in the community in the past. Scriptural de-mythification thereby touches on a realm of human life that is vital for the coherence of a

society, that is, the realm of rituals and feasts. Having made the view of spirits and demons as potent agents in the drama of the seasonal cycles taboo, scripture now has to provide aetiological substitutes to give meaning to the feasts as well as to inspire the effervescence and the perception of renewal that make up the festive atmosphere.[5] In the Islamic context, this reconstruction has been carried out in a particularly rigorous way. The two other monotheistic religions kept the time frame of older seasonal feasts and co-opted their essential symbols, enriching and reshaping them according to the new meaning of the individual feast within salvation history – thus preserving a mythic subtext to be reclaimed whenever desired. Islamic festivals fared differently, however. Though strikingly conservative in terms of ritual procedure (i.e. continuing many of the ancient pre-Islamic ritual performances, clearly informed by the symbolism of changing seasons),[6] Islam has strictly dissociated them from their ancient Arabian precedents through a new calendar which bears no relation to the seasonal cycle, thus dismissing any mythic association emanating from that source.[7] Moreover, the Islamic rites were given new meanings commemorating historical events crucial to the community's identity, or were reinterpreted as mere acts of worship divinely imposed through the words of earlier prophets.[8]

However, myth is not exclusively about supernatural powers working in nature; it is also about extraordinary human figures excelling in strength, courage, shrewdness, endurance and other heroic faculties. In the Hebrew Bible several characters of heroic standing have survived scripturalisation, that is, integration into a vision dominated by divine will: they appear to act autonomously rather than be directed by a divine force. Although not consistently designated as heroic but responding to diverse challenges of human acting and suffering, and never totally severed from divine will or providence, major Biblical figures – primarily Moses and David, and to a lesser degree also Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Solomon as well as more episodic figures like Samson, Ehud and Judith – have retained a heroic image. In contrast, few heroic figures can be found in the Qur'an. Not only are the protagonists of narratives from the ancient Arabian lore absent, but also most of the Biblical figures that do play a role in the Qur'an are not represented as heroes either. Their appearance has been changed: they do not receive a consistent portrayal, nor are their stories continuously followed over a span of time long enough to display character development. Instead, they are presented episodically in very diverse contexts; these figures are not developed enough to impress as heroes. Others, like the Arabian Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shuʿayb, do not act autonomously but remain, throughout, performers of the divine will, so that their actions seem to lack momentum, making it difficult for the listener

to associate them with those key figures contained 'in kindred structures and symbolic systems that range from Gilgamesh and the Hebrew Bible to Homer and Vergil'.[9] Still, in the Qur'an some figures do acquire heroic dimensions, such as Abraham,[10] Joseph,[11] and, especially, Moses.[12]

Qur'anic scripture and storytelling

Scriptural de-mythification, which is particularly strong in the Qur'an, also touches upon another vital need: the transmission of knowledge, particularly the practice of storytelling. Qur'anic narrative has hitherto usually been considered as a continuum. Its treatment of prophetic episodes with similar, sometimes identical, messages led scholars to the conclusion that 'the Qur'anic narrative' attests a cyclical concept of revelation.[13] Although Horovitz, in his groundbreaking study on Qur'anic narrative,[14] strictly committed himself to Nöldeke's periodisation, scholars after him have ordinarily failed to acknowledge, or have even rejected, any substantial development in the Qur'anic representation of prophets and messengers except in terms of increasing detail. In general, the Qur'an has been judged to show no serious interest in history.

This view, which relies on a macrostructural reading of the Qur'an, not surprisingly conforms with the image of the Qur'an that became dominant in Islam itself after the codification and canonisation of the corpus by ʿUthmān: the Qur'an was no longer perceived as a communicational process but as the time-transcending divine word transmitted by the Prophet Muhammad, the final figure in a series of impeccable human messengers bearing an identical message. This ahistorical perception has recently been readopted by a number of modern scholars, inspired by postmodern methodological approaches no longer concerned with philological-historical inquiries and thus unprepared to study the Qur'an as a literary artefact. To view the Qur'an in such a holistic way – in accordance with its later Islamic reading – is, however, only one possible way of reading it, since the ahistorical image of the Qur'an covers another, more complex, layer of understanding that can be laid bare only through an acute microstructural reading.

To do justice to Qur'anic narrative, one has to consider its development during the individual phases of the proclamation process. Stories in the Qur'an may refer to different earlier narrative traditions familiar to the community that may have served as a model for the Qur'anic narrative style. Given the fact that the early suras display a linguistic and stylistic character very similar to the rhymed prose enunciations (*sajʿ*) ascribed to the pre-Islamic soothsayers (*kāhin*, pl. *kahana*) whereas later suras are more like monotheistic liturgies with pericopes of scriptural readings at their centre,

one arrives at the conclusion that Qur'anic narratives partake in diverse discourses and thus constitute at least two distinct groups: texts that still mirror the highly emphatic, succinct and sometimes enigmatic presentations current in *saj' al-kahana*, on the one hand, and texts more inclined towards a lively episodic presentation displaying a sophisticated narrative and exegetical strategies in the vein of Biblical and post-Biblical literature, on the other. The former genre is more strictly formalised and thus limited in its narrative range, relying strongly on repetition, parallelism and anaphors, for example; the latter is flexible, tending towards detail and diversity. Whereas the former drives home one particular message, there are more complex paraenetic intentions behind the second.

Due to the new Qur'anic world view – which stages past and present events as part of the drama of divine interventions in human interactions – the orally transmitted scenarios of Arabian memory in which the protagonists were committed to worldly, often heroic, aims were widely marginalised if not dismissed as a whole or re-interpreted to fit the new paradigm. In the somewhat harsh words of Stetkevych:

> *The knowledge of the communal Arabian past and its inheritors' creative and re-creative self-knowledge within it were definitely not furthered by the concrete, a-historical and anti-mythical doctrinal stance that relegated mythic materials to anecdotal and 'catechistic' functions . . . The problem with a number of [these] nuclei of myth was that in their survival in the new code, that is, through their co-optation by the Qur'ān [and the subsequent dogmatising tradition], they were put to the service of a rhetoric that was almost inimical to 'narrative' itself – this despite the qur'ānic claim that there they are being told in the best of narrative ways. That is, in the Qur'ān, narrative and indeed everything else is subordinated to the overarching rhetoric of salvation and damnation . . . Rarely do we sense in the Qur'ān a self-sufficient and self-justifying joy in storytelling, indeed, rarely, if at all, does the Qur'ān allow for the formation of 'themes' in the literary terminological understanding, that is, of descriptive [of imagist] units that possess their own formal and thematic circumscription and 'sufficiency' and are not intruded upon by a stylistically disruptive rhetoric. Rather than themes in the literary sense, the Qur'ān, therefore, knows primarily rhetorically subordinated motifs.*[15]

What Stetkevych has labelled 'rhetoric of salvation and damnation' is, however, deeply rooted in the Qur'anic message. Thus, from a different perspective, it should be viewed as innovative: the erstwhile pleasing (Latin, *delectans*) purpose of storytelling gives way to an instructive (Latin, *docens*) intent – a

typical late antique mutation of cultural practice. It is, of course, true that Qur'anic storytelling does not express an authorial stance such as that which Alter finds realised in Biblical narrative:

> Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the role played by the narrator in the biblical tales is the way in which omniscience and [u]nobtrusiveness are combined . . . In the Bible . . . . the narrator's work is almost all récit, straight narration of actions and speech, and only exceptionally and very briefly discourse, disquisition on and around the narrated facts and their implications. The assurance of comprehensive knowledge is thus implicit in the narratives, but it is shared with the reader only intermittently and at that quite partially. In this way, the very mode of narration conveys a double sense of a total coherent knowledge available to God [and by implication, to His surrogate, the anonymous authoritative narrator] and the necessary incompleteness of human knowledge, for which much about character, motive, and moral status will remain shrouded in ambiguity.[16]

In comparison to the meticulous shaping of personages and the sophisticated coding and decoding of their motives which characterise Biblical narrative, Qur'anic narrative pursues complex para-narrative aims. Narratives, at least insofar as they are unfolded to some extent and recall plots already known from Biblical literature, are presented as excerpts or messages from the celestial scripture which is clearly taken to be a corpus of texts apart from the rest of the known stories that are currently available through oral tradition. This remoteness of scripture-generated narrative certainly has a strong bearing on the style of the stories presented as scripture readings (*qur'ān*). It forces on them a distinct linguistic code that, on the one hand, confers on the diction a highly stylised form (rhymed prose resulting in somewhat forced syntactic structures), serving to distinguish it from profane narrative. On the other hand, it implants these narratives with the new message of the imminent eschatological catastrophe, which brings the narrative close to an exhortative appeal or, later, a sermon. It is exactly the discursive elements so marginal in Biblical narrative that matter primarily in the Qur'anic narrative: the explicit presentation of the moral or theological implications for the community that can be deduced from the narrated facts or speeches. To fulfil this purpose, a stylistic device unknown to the Bible had been created to accommodate the particular moral or theological deductions from the Qur'anic discourse; this device is known as the *clausula*.[17] *Clausulas* are found at the end of the long verses of late Meccan and Medinan suras: the last sentence or phrase of a verse does not partake in the main strand of communication, but presents a comment on its contents indicating divine approval or disregard of the fact

reported, for example, *surely thou art one of the sinners* (*innaki kunti mina'l-khāṭi'īn*, Q. 12:29). It may also refer to one of God's attributes, for example, *He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing* (*innahu huwa'l-samī'u'l-baṣīr*, Q. 17:1), which, in the later stages of Qur'anic development, became the defining parameters of ideal human behaviour. This comment is clad in a stereotypical form and is thus easily identifiable.

Qur'an and History

How does the Qur'an view history?[18] The Qur'an, at the beginning of its development, encoded history by using the discourse of the *umam khāliya*, the accounts about the dispatch of messengers to previous communities who called their people to worship and obey the one God, but who failed to convert their communities. Here, the Qur'an 'pans over a landscape where time is less a chronology than a continuum'.[19] The scenarios are mostly, though not exclusively, Arabian. The early Qur'anic messenger stories replaced a previously existing culture-specific, coherent pre-Islamic Arabian myth. In Stetkevych's words:

> Arabia and the Arabia-nurtured and Arabic-speaking world has most stubbornly denied itself the acknowledgment of a 'mythological conditioning.' An earnestness, and even somberness, of rigorous theological dogma came to reign with an almost puzzling ... march through more than a millennium of history. It succeeded from the first qur'ānic moment in almost suppressing or banishing into unusually reclusive layers of subconsciousness that part of the counter-dogmatic Arabian cultural 'self' which, under conditions of a less stable doctrinal rigor, would have had the strength to lead that culture to its remythologizing, or to an awareness of its 'mythological conditioning.' In this respect even more inhibiting than the suppressions and condemnations that came forth from the doctrinal apparatus which had formed itself around the newly-arrived Arabian sacred text and which soon succeeded in forming its own cultural code was the co-optation by that new code of much of the most centrally autochthony-determining materials of the old code.[20]

It would be short-sighted, however, to regard the Qur'anic retellings of Arabian legends as merely deficient. The significance of the stories about the Arabian messengers lies in the messengers' endurance (*ṣabr*) and obedience in calling humans to accept divine guidance: every community would have been warned through a revelation in order to be spared temporary or eschatological punishment. As Kenneth Cragg indicates, it is noteworthy that this virtue of endurance in the Qur'an

> ... presupposes triumph. It is an outlasting of evil, rather than its transmuting. Its task is to outstay all opposition so that the good of prophecy is not overcome by the enmity of unbelief. Its endurance keeps the cause from capitulation, so that it may anticipate the victory other factors will achieve. It is not, broadly, a suffering which in itself and of itself makes the fabric of the triumph that is to be. This calls for other forces whose opportunity tenacity ensures.[21]

It is sober and pragmatic thinking and acting (*ḥilm*), and self-denying dedication to the divine message (*islām*) that is portrayed here; it is the reverse of heroic unrestraint (*jahl*). In fact, *jahl* in the Qur'an itself was to become the label of the pre-Islamic epoch that was termed *jāhiliyya*. To quote Stetkevych again:

> Thus *jahl/jāhilīya* had to have been a singularly important concept [or state] in archaic Bedouinity to have deserved such a stupendous 'transfer' into its new terminological prominence – and into its paradoxical semiotic self-denial. We must, therefore, entertain the strong notion that its denial by the new Arabia that emerged with Islam also meant Arabia's denial of myth as its cultural, autochthony-defining ingredient. For myth, all myth, is hardly conceivable without the presence of *jahl* somewhere near its very core. This *jahl*, however, also in its archaic Arabic understanding, is above all that kind of heroism that also contains its own tragic flaw.[22]

The predicament of the ancient messengers whose message is rejected is shared by the Prophet himself. Though the stories of the *umam khāliya* discourse (i.e. the stories of earlier nations destroyed because of their unbelief) thus do not display a historical development, their repeated presentation marks a discursive progress in the Qur'an. The topographical remains of the bygone peoples – erstwhile symbols of pure destruction and loss, devoid of meaning – are endowed with a theological significance explaining the annihilation of the *umam* rationally: God annihilated them because of their wrongdoing, their failure to heed His message. Yet, it remains a fact that the bearers of the revelation and their addressees through history do not form a significant chain of succession. History and revelation at this early stage of the Qur'an's development repeat each other following the same pattern.

However, this discourse has to be differentiated from a grand narrative that emerges at a later stage in the Qur'an. What is usually held as applying to the Qur'an – the absence of a chronological frame for the events of pre-Qur'anic history, the repetitiveness of the Qur'anic narrative ('events are arranged in clusters, repetitive in form'[23]) as a sign of the insistence of the message's

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The predicament of the ancient messengers whose message is rejected is shared by the Prophet himself. Though the stories of the *umam khāliya* discourse (i.e. the stories of earlier nations destroyed because of their unbelief) thus do not display a historical development, their repeated presentation marks a discursive progress in the Qur'an. The topographical remains of the bygone peoples – erstwhile symbols of pure destruction and loss, devoid of meaning – are endowed with a theological significance explaining the annihilation of the *umam* rationally: God annihilated them because of their wrongdoing, their failure to heed His message. Yet, it remains a fact that the bearers of the revelation and their addressees through history do not form a significant chain of succession. History and revelation at this early stage of the Qur'an's development repeat each other following the same pattern.

However, this discourse has to be differentiated from a grand narrative that emerges at a later stage in the Qur'an. What is usually held as applying to the Qur'an – the absence of a chronological frame for the events of pre-Qur'anic history, the repetitiveness of the Qur'anic narrative ('events are arranged in clusters, repetitive in form'[23]) as a sign of the insistence of the message's

unchanged identity, the total disregard for mythic primacy, and so on – upon closer scrutiny does not hold true except for the first paradigm. However, the situation changes substantially when a new paradigm is adopted, switching the focus from the deserted sites of the real homeland to the orbit of the messengers of the people of the scripture (*ahl al-kitāb*), the prophets (*anbiyā'*), whose discourse as intermediaries between God and man is much more sophisticated. Overtly they form a prophetical succession, and their activities taken together not only constitute a scenario of historical episodes but, more and more, betray a tendency to chronology. Their communications and actions prove rich in experiences and suited for exerting a mythopoeic impact on the self-understanding of the emerging community itself. Indeed, these activities often provide the matrix for the behaviour of the Prophet and that of his community in certain situations of crisis; and more often, they provide the basis for the understanding of their own predicament.[24] It is no longer the projection of present experience onto the image of the past that is representative for the earlier discourse, but the converse: experiences of the past provide a model for the understanding of the present. The entrance of the Qur'anic community into the orbit of those earlier societies endowed with a scripture is presented as an event of seismic proportions: *If We had sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, split asunder out of the fear of God* (Q. 59:21).[25] This degree of self-confidence would not have been feasible in the earlier stages; it marks a caesura in the arranging of history that should not be ignored.

> The wide canvas from Adam to Jesus depicts for Muḥammad's people the meaning and destiny of their own cause. Biblical material, in independent shape, is rehearsed in lively corroboration of qur'ānic authority. All prophecy accumulates towards it, so that revelation may culminate. Other Scriptures are mentors, not masters. It is the ruling theme of prophecy as crisis which they consistently serve. The patriarchal retrospect witnesses . . . a continuity of truth and multiplies the signs by which the Meccan/Medinan situation must be read both in conflict and prosperity.[26]

Consequently, it is not surprising to find a particular hermeneutic trait familiar from the Hebrew Bible, and especially the Gospels, prominent again in Qur'anic narrative: typology.[27] 'Types' are exemplary representations in scripture of still more momentous events or more significant figures, 'antitypes', yet to come. Thus the divine trials of the past are to be considered types of the Last Judgement that will supersede everything preceding it, and the dispatch of earlier prophets in a way prefigures Muhammad's activities. This device is crucial for the Qur'anic image of history:

> It is this historical review of the past in the present which gives to the Qur'ān and Islam the characteristic quality of Jihād, or struggle, in the deepest and [most] non-technical sense of that term. The very sequence of the prophets is a sequence of law and claim, of insubordination and nemesis. The logic within it is the unremitting necessity of struggle and the necessary sinews of strength. To bring a divine message is to incur a human enmity and so, in turn, to enter a trial of stamina and resolve, of the will and the means to outstay the opposition. . . . In this logic, suffering is present as a preliminary to its redress. It is that which has to be endured before it can be terminated. It bears the odds until they can be evened and reversed. The successful eventuality is held open by the refusal to be denied it, and this demands persistence and non-compromise. . . . Existence is poised, so to speak, between prophecy and eschatology, in that the prophetic address to humanity must have, in token and in fact, that writ of success which eschatology brings to final authenticity in the last judgment. The utter unambiguity of the eschatological must belong suitably and surely with the interim evidence of prophetic standing in time and in power.[28]

Reflections of Myth and Mythopoiesis in the Qur'an

Virtual myths of history

In the following, an attempt will be undertaken to classify myths and legends in the Qur'an with respect to their cultural contexts. Myths and legends are not to be taken to be mutually exclusive: viewing the stories about earlier prophets as legends does not preclude taking note of their mythical elements. A historical classification following the Biblical succession of scripturalised myths does not appear promising in view of the non-historical disposition of the Qur'an and the absence of the notion of a linear historical process leading up to the present time of the listeners. A certain 'atomism of time' that underlies the Qur'anic vision of history, 'which is typological in nature and focused on the history of the prophets', has been noted.[29] Though this should not be taken to apply generally to the entire range of Qur'anic narrative, the story of Adam as told in the Meccan suras could be a case in point. The myth of man's first transgression (told in Genesis 3), in the Qur'an does not serve to initiate history as an unpredictable and ambiguous process of divine–human interaction, but rather constitutes one exemplary episode of the anthropological constant of human vulnerability to be seduced. Except for the expulsion from the garden, however, this does not bear grave consequences for the fate of humankind. The myth, which is introduced at a rather late stage of Qur'anic

development and is presented in diverse contexts, serves to demonstrate changing insights into the nature of evil: it is less a myth of beginning than a debate about evil. The account will therefore be treated in its typological context (see 'Transgressions of Boundaries' later in this chapter). It needs, however, to be mentioned that the story in its Medinan retelling does acquire historical momentum: Adam's superiority over all the other beings created by God is made functional in the story of his being sent to earth to act as God's deputy, as his *khalīfa* (Q. 2:30).[30]

Noah

The Biblically prominent myth of the renewal of the world after the flood (Genesis 6:5–17) in the Qur'an does not appear in its mythical-historical setting as the closure of a period of immediate divine interventions into creation as a whole.[31] This story is related (or alluded to) within the two discourses of the bygone peoples, the *umam khāliya*, and of the succession of the prophets. First conveyed as the initial account in a chain of so-called retribution legends in Q. 54:9–17 (followed by stories about ʿĀd, Thamūd, Lot and the people of Pharaoh) and, subsequently, as a story filling a complete sura, *Sūrat Nūḥ* (Q. 71:1–28), the story of Noah does not stand out. It may be termed a legend at this stage since it is perfectly in tune with the other stereotypical narratives which feature a messenger, who is no longer historically tangible, who fails to convert his people to monotheism. Noah is introduced in isolation from a particular salvation-historical beginning, although the event is obviously imagined as having preceded all the other stories in time. It is shaped according to the pattern of the punishment stories that emerged during the first Meccan period. Accordingly, both the flood and the ark are devoid of mythical dimensions, being reduced to mere instruments of punishment and salvation respectively. The story continues to be remembered through the entire Meccan period, not only in extended lists of retribution legends (Q. 7:69; Q. 11:89; Q. 14:9; Q. 38:12; Q. 50:12; Q. 51:46), but also in narrative form. In Q. 37:75–9 it is followed by a story about Abraham confronting his unbelieving community and other episodes in the history of the Israelites; in Q. 26:105–22 it is followed by stories about ʿĀd, Thamūd, the people of Lot and the people of the thicket (*aṣḥāb al-ayka*), always presenting Noah as a member of his people (*akh*, Q. 26:106) who tries to convert them. None of these reports, however, dwell on the mythical dimension of the story as the first major caesura in history.

Noah receives new momentum after the change of paradigm and the new orientation to the *kitāb* tradition staging the Israelites. The viewing of the prophets as a chain of succession within the orbit of scripture gives each one

new, individual significance. This change is reflected in a particularly extensive version of Noah's story in Q. 11:25–49, again followed by kindred stories of ʿĀd and others. Here, both the preparation of the ark and the selection of the animals are mentioned. The cosmic dimension of the flood is alluded to, the final blessing on Noah sounding as if the event was meant as a caesura in salvation history (an echo of this version appears in Q. 10:71–4). At this later stage of the canonical process, when the community has identified itself as belonging to the Biblical elect, and the imagined world of the Bible has superseded the real scenario around the sanctuary of Mecca, Noah is elevated from his rank as a mere warner (*rasūl*) to that of a prophet (*nabī*) in the line of Adam – (Noah) – Abraham – Jesus. In this context, the longevity (Noah remained among his people for 950 years; Q. 29:14) and genealogical relations in general occasionally gain momentum: thus the Israelites are presented as the *seed of those We bore with Noah* (*dhurriyyata man ḥamalnā maʿa Nūḥ*, Q. 17:3; see also Q. 19:58). In still later Medinan suras, such as Q. 33:7, when the Prophet Muhammad himself has entered the rank of the prophets of the Biblical tradition and prophets are viewed as partners in a covenant, Noah appears as the first: *And when We took compact from the Prophets and from thee and from Noah* (*wa-idh akhadhnā mina'l-nabiyyna mīthāqahum wa-minka wa-min Nūḥ*, Q. 33:7). A structuring of prophetical history is in the making and it is this period of time into which the later addition to *Sūrat Maryam*, Q. 19:58, fits: *These are they whom God has blessed among the Prophets of the seed of Adam, and of those We bore with Noah* [*on the ark*] . . . (*ūlā'ika'lladhīna anʿama'llāhu ʿalayhim mina'l-nabiyyīna min dhurriyyati Ādama wa min man ḥamalnā maʿa Nūḥ* . . .). This development reaches its climax in Q. 3:33: *God chose Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham and the House of* [*Amram*] above [*the inhabitants of the Worlds*] (*inna'llāha'ṣṭafā Ādama wa-Nūḥan wa Āla Ibrāhīma wa-Āla ʿImrāna ʿalā'l-ʿālamīn*). Accordingly, the divine commandments are transmitted through that line of succession, as is indicated in Q. 42:13: *He has laid down for you as religion that He charged Noah with, and that We have revealed to thee* (*sharaʿa lakum mina'l-dīni mā waṣṣā bihi Nūḥan wa'lladhī awḥaynā ilayka*).

Still, Noah remains part of two traditions: that of an episodic warner (in Medinan suras: Q. 9:70; Q. 22:42), one of many, whose people in their majority vanish and who thus would have no spiritual survival, and that of a prophet whose reception is secured through his participation in a succession of prophets who belong to the scriptural, that is Biblical, tradition. What is most striking in the legend of Noah, which thus becomes 'a story of the prophet', is the lack, or at least the fading appearance, of the essentially mythical characteristics of the story. Thus, the catastrophic uniqueness of the event, the

vehemence of the divine wrath inducing the creator to annihilate humankind (Genesis 6:5–8), the universality of the catastrophe, are nowhere expressed. The historical dimension, the renewal after the drowning of humankind, is not dramatised, the divine reacceptance of humankind being only partial (Q. 11:48), to say nothing of the conclusion of a new covenant between God and man (Genesis 9:8–17). Not surprisingly, the age before the deluge is not marked, as it is in the Bible and in later Islamic historiography,[32] by particular physical anomalies such as the existence of fabulous creatures and miraculous qualities in humans, thus appearing as an epoch which does not yet partake in the historical period proper, but demands a new, a second, beginning. In the Qur'an the flood has no such function.

David and Solomon: Virtual cultural heroes?

As with the story of Noah, the Solomonic mythic florilegium, which in the Qur'an reflects post-Biblical rather than Biblical knowledge, does not constitute a cohesive story. Indeed, it oscillates between a legend and a story of prophets. It focuses on Solomon's and David's power over the animal and spirit world, as well as natural phenomena: David is lord of the birds (Q. 38:19), he commands the mountains (Q. 38:18; Q. 34:10); Solomon understands the language of the birds (Q. 27:16) and of the ants (Q. 27:18), he commands the wind (Q. 21:81; Q. 34:12; Q. 38:36) and is in control of the demons (*shayāṭīn*) and spirits (*jinn*) (Q. 21:82). At the same time, both have attained the rank of prophets. In David's case, this merit is underlined by his receiving the psalms (*zabūr*, Q. 17:55), his competent judgement (Q. 21:78), his repentance (Q. 38:21–6; see also 2 Samuel 2:1–15) and his just government; all these qualify him to be called a *khalīfa* on earth (Q. 38:26), an exemplary ruler.[33] In Solomon's case this rank is evidenced by his being granted command over nature and demons. Yet, both remain widely symbolic, legendary figures. Solomon's essential fame is due to his miraculous relationship with animals and demons that have particular supernatural faculties – a privilege that, however, does not distract him from his devotion to the one God. His faithfulness is particularly manifest in the episode about the conversion of the Queen of Sheba.[34] When her throne is transferred to his palace by a demon, the *ʿifrīt*, he understands the miraculous act not as his personal triumph but as a trial (*fitna*) to prove his gratefulness to God (Q. 27:40). His aesthetically stunning palace (*ṣarḥ*) with fittings so fine that they produce a *trompe l'oeil* – the queen takes the brilliant floor to be a water pool – becomes the reason for the conversion of the queen to the worship of the one God, thus constituting an antitype to the towering building erected by Pharaoh (also *ṣarḥ*) whose blasphemous intent was to climb up high enough to see the God of Moses.[35]

There are some hints at the conception of both figures as innovators: David is able to make coats of mail (Q. 21:80; Q. 34:10–11) and Solomon is knowledgeable about a source of metal (Q. 34:12). Yet, their story hardly serves as an aetiology for the human attainment of control over material resources and individual technical inventions; nor do the related facts mark initial achievements sufficient to portray the protagonists as cultural heroes.

Moses' exodus (*isrāʾ*)

The only Qur'anic narrative that could be viewed as a myth of history is the report of the exodus of Moses,[36] which in Jewish tradition signifies the deliverance of the Israelites from oppression and slavery, and their settlement in the Promised Land. For the nascent Muslim community, the exodus out of a situation of oppression becomes a prototype for the believers' taking refuge from oppressive unbelieving rulers or the urban elite. The event of the Biblical exodus (*isrāʾ*) would have exerted some influence on the Prophet's own experience of his emigration to Medina, though it is nowhere recorded as the model followed by him. The exodus serves more as a pattern of finding spiritual relief through an imagined escape from the oppressors: through the Prophet's translation to the temple in Jerusalem (termed *isrāʾ* in Q. 17:1), which occurred at a time when social suppression of the believers in Mecca had become unbearable.[37] It is noteworthy that the Biblical story of the exodus is not reflected through a fully fledged narrative but is only briefly evoked in Q. 37:115–16, Q. 20:77 and Q. 26:15–17. It does not, moreover, represent the decisive turning point in the history of Moses' people, though the Israelites' march through the sea on dry ground is recognised as the sign of a miraculous salvation. It is worth noting that in the Qur'anic story of Moses, the exodus is rivalled by another event as the solution for the oppressed Israelites, since the salvation of Moses' people is also portrayed as being a typological reprisal of the flood story.[38] Thus, the invitation to Noah and his family to settle after the flood (Q. 23:29) finds its analogy in the Israelites being given the land of Egypt (Q. 17:104; see also Q. 7:137; Q. 26:59) with all its gardens, springs, fields and treasures (Q. 26:57–8; Q. 44:25–8). Unlike the Biblical exodus, it is perhaps less a change of place that matters here. In the Qur'anic view the Promised Land may be situated anywhere that it is possible for the believers to live uncompromised – whether it is a place purged of unbelievers through a divine trial or a place where the unbelievers have no further access to the believers after the latter have found refuge by an emigration (*hijra*). Indeed, an exodus, an *isrāʾ*, may even be performed spiritually, as shown in the example of the Prophet's night journey to the Jerusalem temple (Q. 17:1).

Power and Violence

Local history inscribed with God's terror: *al-umam al-khāliya*

There appears to be one single, though variegated, archetypal paradigm in the Qur'an that has retained its cathartic power throughout the development of the corpus: the story of the annihilated nations, the bygone communities, *al-umam al-khāliya*. This archetypal topic, which in the Qur'an has taken the place of the Biblical myth of the destruction of the Babylonian tower (Genesis 11:1–9),[39] is about human hubris resulting in a divine retaliation that annihilates the community and destroys their ambitious project of self-sufficient existence. In the Qur'an it is not one event but a cycle of similar occurrences that demonstrates this pattern. Repeatedly, ancient communities have waxed proud about their social success, their wealth, sometimes their luxuriously built residences, their security and fame. Upon being reminded by a divine messenger of God's injunction to worship and give thanks, they defy and mock the warning. They are then overtaken by God's punishment and are destroyed. The enigma of the still visible ruins and the vague memory of formerly flourishing communities in the broader neighbourhood of the listeners have thus been explained. It was not unfavourable climatic conditions, as presupposed for the deserted living spaces recalled in the amatory introduction of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*,[40] or changes in the area's balance of power that caused the disappearance of the once glorious cities, but a dramatic divine intervention, an outburst of divine wrath. The two most expressively presented concepts in these punishment stories are human hubris on the one hand, unfolded in quotations of the unbelievers' words of rejection, and divine wrath on the other, manifest in the rapidity, the suddenness of destruction often initiated by a divine sign, a seismic scream, or brought about by a vehement storm, an earthquake and the like.

Horovitz,[41] who first examined the retribution legends (or punishment stories), classified them as legends. They would deserve, however, to be considered as archetypal stories: human hubris, entailing blasphemy, leads to divine retaliation. What is missing from the stories is the expression of a fatal human intent to rival God – as is characteristic of the Biblical tower-builders. The Qur'anic city-dwellers do not seek a confrontation with God: not being monotheistic believers they treat the divine warning rather indifferently, reacting (if at all) with arrogance and annoyance. Thus, as far as the contest between the peoples and their messengers is concerned, the Qur'anic narrative remains largely devoid of dramatic effects. The ever-recurrent typological pattern is overwhelming; it is due to an interpretation of history informed by the experience of the Prophet and his community: 'Just as the qur'ānic

emphasis on the atomism of time had frozen the flux of time into that of reiterated instants of God's action, so its typology of history had collapsed the rich variety of past events into a regularly recurring pattern."[42] This conceded loss in terms of quantitative knowledge of historical facts may be viewed, however, as a gain in expressiveness in the process of conveying the message. It is God's role that retains highly dramatic traits; the divine figure appears sometimes strikingly close to that of a mythic agent, as is seen in Q. 91:14: *so their* [i.e. the Thamūd's] *Lord crushed them for their sin, and levelled them* [their dwellings] (*fa-damdama ʿalayhim rabbuhum bi-dhanbihim fa-sawwāhā*), and in Q. 89:13: *Thy Lord unloosed on them a scourge of chastisement* (*fa-ṣabba ʿalayhim rabbuka sawṭa ʿadhāb*). This highly metaphoric speech is made possible by the linguistic medium of *sajʿ*, which would be ill-suited to accommodate complex narratives. One has to keep in mind that the historical and temporal scope of the early Qur'an cannot be viewed in isolation from the Qur'an's rhetorical tradition, whose *kāhin*-speech models are undeniable. *Kāhin* speech is shrouded in mystery; rather than revealing facts, it encodes them. Since the situation in antiquity was typologically close to that faced by the believing group around the Prophet, the vacuum is filled with rejoinders from their experience. Thus, the current situation acquires surplus meaning by being underscored with an archetypal dimension whose pattern even appears inscribed in the landscape of the broader homeland.

Although the stories about the flood, on the one hand, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the punishment of Pharaoh, on the other, are not geographically associated with the Arabian peninsula,[43] they reveal in the early suras the pattern of the Arabian retaliation legends. In summary, one may note that the punishment stories provide a pattern for the initial lack of success experienced by the Prophet and his community in Mecca. Worldly values held by the unbelieving elites along with an endangered and isolated stance on the part of the messenger make up the ever-repeated pattern without generating a linear relation between them.[44]

Transgressions of Boundaries

The first act of disobedience as a double aetiology: Man's exile from paradise, Satan's representation of evil

An explicit divine interdiction was violated by the first man, Adam, and his unnamed spouse: despite a divine injunction not to approach a particular tree in paradise, they both tasted its forbidden fruit. Through this act they became

aware of their nakedness. Shocked by this new awareness which they felt as shameful exposure, they cover themselves. Soon afterwards, they are called on by God to account for their transgression. Instead of being cursed and condemned to hard work and painful childbearing, as in the Biblical precedent, they are treated rather gently. They are 'sent down' (*ihbiṭū*) from paradise to settle on earth – not, however, to their fatal detriment, since this punishment is immediately followed by a new offer of divine guidance.[45] Nor is the news of their mortality, which is disclosed to them together with the news of their exile (Q. 20:117), momentous since it is alleviated by the simultaneous assurance of their ultimate resurrection.

As in the Bible (Genesis 3:1–24), the story serves inter alia to explain the existence of humankind on earth; this earthly existence according to the Qur'anic narrative is not, however, in any striking contrast to the couple's sojourn in paradise, since their terrestrial habitat is not a cursed place but a convenient if not luxurious place.[46] More often, the story is adduced to demonstrate the dangerous nature of Satan – his obsequiousness in exposing man's nakedness (Q. 7:27), his insincerity in promising benefits he will not deliver (Q. 7:22). Satan, who from the beginning of the Qur'anic reception of the story (in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*) is instrumental in the couple's transgression, is only in the last report (*Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*) ultimately to blame. It is obviously not the aetiological dimension that caused the story to be repeatedly presented in the Qur'an since a few virtual aetiologies (which, in the Biblical report support the significance of the narrative as a cultural myth) remain unexploited, such as the fact of the first couple's achieving a mature perception of themselves, their learning about their sexuality and their inventing the custom of wearing clothing. The *telos* of the story, rather, is theodicy. It is true, the first couple were not substantially blamed and punished for their disobedience, yet the pattern of transgression followed by rendering account – a particularly effective archetype – has been established as the primordial pattern of human–divine interaction. In the Qur'anic understanding, the perpetrator's regret saves him from a harsh punishment.

Satan, under the name of Iblīs, was viewed in the beginning as the tester, the agent of legitimate challenge to humans. He was delegated to perform this task during a debate with God that arose after he had shown his defiance of blind obedience, refusing to bow down before a being (Q. 15:33) other than his divine Lord, a being that even appeared inferior due to the base matter from which it was created. Indeed, the transition of created beings from submissive creatures to autonomous agents in the interaction with the Divine (which is experienced by Adam in the Biblical tradition) is, in the Qur'an, Iblīs' achievement whose tragic consequences he takes upon himself. It is only

through his work that the elect community, who is not liable to fall victim to his seduction, becomes distinguishable from the unbelievers. Whereas God Himself in the first debate scene agreed to the project proposed by Iblīs (Q. 15:41), in the further development of the community, Iblīs' image – once his persona has merged with that of Satan (*al-shayṭān*) – darkens considerably: in the end he appears as the enemy of humans, the personification of evil. He and his escorts will therefore be annihilated in hellfire so as to re-establish justice at the end of time. Iblīs is, however, rehabilitated in later Islamic tradition. Although the Qur'anic account of creation does not culminate in the human acquisition of knowledge through the eating of fruit picked at Satan's instigation from the forbidden tree, Iblīs is still raised in the profane tradition to the rank of the tester, the permanent agent of provocation through whom a substantial broadening of horizons of experience becomes possible. He enjoys an equally unique position in at least one branch of Sufi tradition that has strongly influenced literature; in this tradition, Iblīs is acknowledged as the sole figure possessing knowledge about the true will of God as opposed to His mere commandment. His ongoing influence – not only as an ambivalent, but tragic figure as well – continues to manifest itself in diverse forms.[47]

The elect space: From Mecca to Jerusalem

The mythical notion of a space that exceeds all other space in significance is traceable in the Qur'an, though it is widely modified to suit the framework of a religion of revelation. While there is a strong notion of Mecca's excellence in the early suras (Q. 90:1; Q. 95:3), the focus during the middle Meccan era switches to Jerusalem, which enjoys the unique rank of being the point of orientation in the prayer of the early community. Although the Qur'an itself does not explicitly mention Jerusalem by name, the adoption of the rite to pray towards it, the Jerusalem *qibla*, clearly presupposes its high rank in the community.[48] The miraculous night journey of the Prophet transferred him temporarily to the remote temple (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*, Q. 17:1), Jerusalem, the destination of the prayers of the community. During the later Meccan activities of the Prophet, Jerusalem with its temple becomes the prototype of a Holy City. In Medina it served as the model for the perception of a religious centre, after which the image of the new Islamic sanctuary, Mecca, was shaped. Mecca, which takes over as the space of origin for Islam, is thus not only a place from which the Islamic ritual originated, but also – in analogy to Jerusalem (see Isaiah 2:3: 'For out of Zion shall go forth the law [the Torah] and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem') – the birthplace of Islamic verbal worship, as indicated in Q. 2:129: '. . . *our Lord, do Thou send among them a Messenger, one of them, who shall recite to them Thy signs, and teach them the*

[Scripture] and the Wisdom, and purify them; Thou art the All-mighty, the All-wise' (*rabbanā wa-bʿath fīhim rasūlan minhum yatlū ʿalayhim āyātika wa yuʿallimuhumu'l-kitāba wa'l-ḥikmata wa yuzakkīhim innaka anta'l-ʿAzīzu'l-Ḥakīm*).[49] As the place at which all Muslim prayers converge, Mecca is the centre of the earth. It is the new Jerusalem.

Love and Sexuality

Joseph and Zulaykhā (Genesis 39:7–20; Q. 12:23–34; 50–53)

The myth of the woman who, through her seduction of the man, brought mischief into the world does not exist in the Qur'an. Eve was not instrumental in Adam's transgression and is thus not considered responsible for Adam's predicament. Still, the notion of an innate deviousness in women is alluded to in the Qur'anic story of Joseph, labelled women's ruse (*kayd al-nisā'*), which is explicitly attributed to the (unnamed) wife of the (equally unnamed) Egyptian official – the mighty one (*al-ʿazīz*) – in whose house Joseph had lodged. Although she does not succeed in seducing Joseph and leading him astray from his way as a chosen one of God, she does exercise some power over him. She tries to seduce him, but he finds the strength to resist her through divine intervention (Q. 12:24). Still, she is not categorically derogated in the Qur'an; rather, unlike the situation in the Biblical story, she is given the opportunity to repent and acknowledge her moral failure. This opens the way for her post-Qur'anic rehabilitation and elevation to the rank of Joseph's beloved and, in some traditions, even wife. It is worth noting that though her behaviour in Qur'anic terms appears to be an attempted act of *zinā* (adultery or fornication), which is condemned in the Qur'anic Decalogue,[50] she is not actually accused of such a transgression of the limits set to female freedom in the story of Joseph itself. In view of her positive image in the Qur'an, it is not surprising that she could be accepted in Sufism as a female icon.

The virgin mother: Mary

A reverse projection of the seductress is the virgin mother, Mary, whose story fills the decisive part of the Meccan *Sūrat Maryam*. Though the outward appearance of her fate manifests a case of transgression of the limits of female freedom, she is herself innocent from the violation of any social norm. Having conceived a child outside of marriage, she is rescued from the wrath of her relatives only by a miracle: her infant son is endowed with the power of speech and speaks up on her behalf. He presents himself as God's elect, a rank also enjoyed by John the Baptist, the son of Zachariah, whose birth was likewise

accompanied by miraculous circumstances. Mary is the only female figure in the Qur'an presented by name; she also has the privilege of having God's word personally addressed to her through an angelic messenger.[51] Mary's extended story in the Medinan *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* presents her as being raised in the Jerusalem temple, isolated from interaction with the mundane world.[52] It is her purity and chastity that essentially make up her Qur'anic image. In *Sūrat Maryam*, her story seems to be told with the intent to exemplify divine mercy, a concept that looms large in the middle Meccan suras and which is a particularly frequently repeated topic of that sura. At the same time a reaffirmation of her image as the virgin, so prominent in Christian belief, seems to be at stake. In the Medinan re-narration of her story, it is her involvement as a core figure in the Christological paradox that is foregrounded – apparently with the purpose of legitimising the existence of the phenomenon of the occurrences of paradoxes in scripture.[53] In the Qur'an, Mary, who does not have to experience her son's passion, is not presented as a suffering mother as she is in Christian tradition. In Islam the prototype of the suffering woman is, in later tradition, embodied in Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet. Thus, the role that, according to Christian understanding, Mary plays in the eschatological realm is, in Islam, taken over by Fāṭima, although with a marked difference. As Susan Sered notes:

> [In Islamic tradition] only Mary has a necessary role in the scheme of redemption. Fatima plays a more active role at the End of Days than does Mary, but there is no suggestion in Islam that redemption would be impossible without her. According to the [Shiʿite] Islamic view of redemption as the fulfilment of human life through suffering, Fatima, as the greatest sufferer on earth, will enjoy the greatest rewards on the day of resurrection.[54]

Paradisiacal distributions of the genders

What is not stressed in the narratives is, however, presupposed in the Qur'anic worldview: it is male dominance that 'informs life on earth and life in heaven … While the Qur'an assures women of faith that they will go to heaven [Q. 4:124; Q. 16:97] it offers them no insight as to what their place in heaven will be'.[55] Paradisiacal space – this has been lamented over and over by Muslim feminists – seems to be equipped solely for male believers. It is true that the early depictions of paradise which appear in the early suras and portray banquet scenes with the believers being served by handsome youths and enjoying the company of (or being married to) beautiful young girls, labelled *ḥūr ʿīn* for the striking beauty of their eyes, reflect a purely male imagination of ultimate happiness (Q. 55:56–8; Q. 44:54). These descriptions of the Qur'anic

[Scripture] and the Wisdom, and purify them; Thou art the All-mighty, the All-wise' (*rabbanā wa-bʿath fīhim rasūlan minhum yatlū ʿalayhim āyātika wa yuʿallimuhumu'l-kitāba wa'l-ḥikmata wa yuzakkīhim innaka anta'l-ʿAzīzu'l-Ḥakīm*).[49] As the place at which all Muslim prayers converge, Mecca is the centre of the earth. It is the new Jerusalem.

Love and Sexuality

Joseph and Zulaykhā (Genesis 39:7–20; Q. 12:23–34; 50–53)

The myth of the woman who, through her seduction of the man, brought mischief into the world does not exist in the Qur'an. Eve was not instrumental in Adam's transgression and is thus not considered responsible for Adam's predicament. Still, the notion of an innate deviousness in women is alluded to in the Qur'anic story of Joseph, labelled women's ruse (*kayd al-nisā'*), which is explicitly attributed to the (unnamed) wife of the (equally unnamed) Egyptian official – the mighty one (*al-ʿazīz*) – in whose house Joseph had lodged. Although she does not succeed in seducing Joseph and leading him astray from his way as a chosen one of God, she does exercise some power over him. She tries to seduce him, but he finds the strength to resist her through divine intervention (Q. 12:24). Still, she is not categorically derogated in the Qur'an; rather, unlike the situation in the Biblical story, she is given the opportunity to repent and acknowledge her moral failure. This opens the way for her post-Qur'anic rehabilitation and elevation to the rank of Joseph's beloved and, in some traditions, even wife. It is worth noting that though her behaviour in Qur'anic terms appears to be an attempted act of *zinā* (adultery or fornication), which is condemned in the Qur'anic Decalogue,[50] she is not actually accused of such a transgression of the limits set to female freedom in the story of Joseph itself. In view of her positive image in the Qur'an, it is not surprising that she could be accepted in Sufism as a female icon.

The virgin mother: Mary

A reverse projection of the seductress is the virgin mother, Mary, whose story fills the decisive part of the Meccan *Sūrat Maryam*. Though the outward appearance of her fate manifests a case of transgression of the limits of female freedom, she is herself innocent from the violation of any social norm. Having conceived a child outside of marriage, she is rescued from the wrath of her relatives only by a miracle: her infant son is endowed with the power of speech and speaks up on her behalf. He presents himself as God's elect, a rank also enjoyed by John the Baptist, the son of Zachariah, whose birth was likewise

accompanied by miraculous circumstances. Mary is the only female figure in the Qur'an presented by name; she also has the privilege of having God's word personally addressed to her through an angelic messenger.[51] Mary's extended story in the Medinan *Sūrat Āl ʿImrān* presents her as being raised in the Jerusalem temple, isolated from interaction with the mundane world.[52] It is her purity and chastity that essentially make up her Qur'anic image. In *Sūrat Maryam*, her story seems to be told with the intent to exemplify divine mercy, a concept that looms large in the middle Meccan suras and which is a particularly frequently repeated topic of that sura. At the same time a reaffirmation of her image as the virgin, so prominent in Christian belief, seems to be at stake. In the Medinan re-narration of her story, it is her involvement as a core figure in the Christological paradox that is foregrounded – apparently with the purpose of legitimising the existence of the phenomenon of the occurrences of paradoxes in scripture.[53] In the Qur'an, Mary, who does not have to experience her son's passion, is not presented as a suffering mother as she is in Christian tradition. In Islam the prototype of the suffering woman is, in later tradition, embodied in Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet. Thus, the role that, according to Christian understanding, Mary plays in the eschatological realm is, in Islam, taken over by Fāṭima, although with a marked difference. As Susan Sered notes:

> [In Islamic tradition] only Mary has a necessary role in the scheme of redemption. Fatima plays a more active role at the End of Days than does Mary, but there is no suggestion in Islam that redemption would be impossible without her. According to the [Shiʿite] Islamic view of redemption as the fulfilment of human life through suffering, Fatima, as the greatest sufferer on earth, will enjoy the greatest rewards on the day of resurrection.[54]

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janna (literally, garden) have been discussed in detail by Horovitz,[56] who suggests that they reflect magnifications of festal banquets familiar in the circles of tribal elites and were well known to those listening to the Qur'an from their representation in ancient Arabic poetry. They may thus be understood as static tableaux of both natural and sensual consummation and spiritual bliss. Rippin, in contrast, has viewed these images as a 'fundamental appreciation of ideal human nature as the monotheistic tradition conceives it'.[57] However, the images of the garden have been interpreted by anthropologists (who view them through their exegetical amplifications) primarily under the aspect of sexual satisfaction and exclusively male experience; thus, Margaret E. Combs Schilling claims:

> With the ḥūrī, sexual satisfaction is never ending, and not marred by fear as it is on earth. Men have nothing to fear from the huris, for they have no personalities, no individual desires, no chance for roaming; the Qur'an guarantees their virginity, that they will not have been touched by man nor jinn when the believing male enters them, and they will be permanently attached to the man whom they are given.[58]

Whereas earlier suras could invite such interpretations – although the perspective of the modern anthropologist is definitely far remote from that of the contemporary listeners – later texts substantially modified the image. Their explicit reference to female participation in paradisiacal recompense (Q. 43:70–73) reflects a new understanding of earthly and heavenly life by the listeners. Meanwhile, a community had been established where women – not least in the Prophet's own household – played vital roles. The issue of transcendent happiness was no longer taken as part of a symbolic realm, but its details were debated and fleshed out to form a reference text for the believers. The impressionistic, somewhat enigmatic and highly symbolic text of the old *janna* descriptions was transformed into a reference text where, ritually and legally, everything would be spelled out unambiguously in terms of justice and morals. It may be helpful for understanding the context and historical conditions of the Qur'anic descriptions of *janna* to remember that the Prophet himself may have had a more complex and positive appreciation of women. Combs Schilling has ventured a comparison between 'Ā'isha, Muhammad's wife, and Jesus' companion, Mary Magdalene:

> Islam has its 'A'isha just as Christianity has its Mary Magdalene. Both are highly charged sexual and sensual females – the one suspected of adultery in the desert, the other confirmed of prostitution – and yet each is valued as somehow intrinsically pure and good in the eyes of the founder of the faith,

Muhammad or Jesus. It seems plausible that these founders did not dichotomize sexuality and spirituality in the ways that their followers did, and in fact found them persuasively combined in these women. Yet their esteem for that combination was not to endure. Neither 'A'isha nor Mary Magdalene became the dominant image of the proper female in the respective cultural traditions that arose out of the two faiths . . . Yet it could be argued that the founders of the two faiths were broader in their understanding of the possible combinations of faith, womanhood and sexuality than the majority of their followers and that they made their acceptance clear – Muhammad by dying in 'A'isha's arms and Jesus by first appearing after his crucifixion to Mary Magdalene, whom he authorized to go and tell the male disciples the earthshaking news that he still lived.[59]

Fates of the Hero

Among the few figures in the Qur'an who acquire heroic dimensions, the most prominent are Abraham and Moses. Their stories are not devoid of archetypal traits as the following selected examples illustrate.

Abraham: Destroyer of idols

Abraham is the protagonist of a most diversified narrative distributed over several Qur'anic texts.[60] The earliest achievement in his career is the smashing of the idols of his people, that is, the destruction of the old order, thus making a new order possible. The achievement, which is not Biblical but Midrashic, portrays him as a cultural hero. Two incidents – a debate with an unbelieving ruler (Q. 2:258–60), usually identified as Nimrod, and the destruction of the idols of his father (according to the most plausible chronology: Q. 37:83–98, Q. 26:69–86, Q. 19:41–50, Q. 21:51–73, Q. 29:16–27, Q. 6:74–84), which is followed by his being sentenced to be burnt alive, a fate from which he is saved by God (Q. 37:97–8, Q. 21:68–9, Q. 29:24) – lead to his leaving his homeland. Abraham performs a *hijra*, a secession from his father and his homeland, to encounter God in a new land where he will raise his family (Q. 19:48–9, Q. 21:71, Q. 29:27). Though a number of further encounters with God are related in the Qur'an, it is his early identification as a monotheist, *ḥanīf*, in a pagan world that elevates him to his unique rank in the Qur'an, and later in Islam, as the founder of monotheistic worship. With his emigration he sets an example for the believer who, when subjected to religious persecution, chooses emigration. He becomes the prototype of the Prophet Muhammad and, as such, rightly figures prominently in the text of the Muslim ritual prayer.

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Abraham: The sacrificer

The inverted approach to the phenomenon of succession – not by the son replacing the father, but the father's preparedness to sacrifice his son[61] – is reflected in the Qur'an in the episode of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son (Q. 37:102–13). Unlike the Biblical case (Genesis 2:1–19) – though in harmony with Rabbinic tradition – in the Qur'an, the son voluntarily offers himself as a sacrifice, but both are spared the enactment of it through divine intervention. The story, which is the central aetiology of the Islamic pilgrimage (a ceremony whose establishment is ascribed to Abraham), has been interpreted by anthropologists as a corroboration of patriarchy: 'The Ibrahim myth powerfully undergirds the rightful domination of father over son, of senior men over junior men, of all males over females and children – of patriarchy . . . Islam's myth both transcends and reinforces patrilineality, the inheritance of goods and position through the male line.'[62]

The idea of patrilineality as a significant relationship is once more revitalised in Medina, although it never attains the value attached to it in Judaism. In Medina the narrative of Abraham's nigh sacrifice is connected to the central regionally cherished religious symbol, the ritual of sacrifice in the context of the pilgrimage which had advanced to the rank of a religious duty of the emerging new religion during the Medinan ministry of the Prophet. The old ritual of sacrifice thus acquires new meaning: Abraham is established as the founder of the rites of pilgrimage, as his personal sacrifice serves as an example to the believers. The ceremony, in which performers stage an act of mimesis of Abraham, thus becomes a priceless valorisation of the erstwhile pagan rite of sacrifice.

Whereas the initiation of the act of sacrifice remains solely Abraham's merit, his establishment of the Meccan sanctuary is presented as a task performed in synergy with his son, Ishmael. Typologically read, this task carried out by father and son is a restaging of Abraham's Biblical achievement of erecting the sacrificial altar at Mount Moriah. In Mecca, the new Jerusalem, Abraham and Ishmael lay the foundation for the local sanctuary of the Kaaba, again intended as a universally sacred place for mankind in a striking re-enactment of an act of momentous foundation.[63] Since this son is known as the forefather of important Arab tribes, a claim to Arab privileges based on the Abrahamic genealogy might be expected to have evolved. Yet, this did not occur. It is not the relationship of the Muslim Arab believers to Abraham as their forefather, but the relationship to Abraham as their role model, *imām*, that is accepted and affirmed in the Qur'an. This renunciation of religious privilege, in the vein of the Jewish 'merit of the fathers', cannot be overestimated.

It underscores the Qur'anic insistence on morally rather than genetically legitimised esteem, as the often quoted Q. 49:13 attests: *Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you (Inna akramakum 'inda'llāhi atqākum).*[64]

Moses: Prophet and leader of his people and prototype of the Prophet Muhammad

The similarities between the Islamic Prophet and Moses are already attested in the early suras.[65] *Sūrat al-Ṭūr* and *Sūrat al-Tīn* start with an oath by both Mount Sinai and the sanctuary of Mecca – the scene of Muhammad's activity. Moses is evoked in Meccan suras more than 120 times, more often than any other Biblical figure. This is not surprising since Moses is the Israelite prophet par excellence. It is to him God spoke with an intimacy not extended to any other messenger before. He was also the one who had been given the Torah and, by leading the Israelites out of Egypt, shaped the destiny of his people. It is worth noting that Moses is portrayed as a messenger sent to an unbelieving ruler, Pharaoh, but unlike the other early warners, he is from the beginning uniquely equipped for this task. He was called by God at a sacred place where he was allowed to hear the voice of God himself (Q. 20:12; see also Q. 79:16) and was ordered to perform (and endorse) the ritual prayer (Q. 20:14). It is this particular authorisation and his subsequent delivery from fear and anxiety (Q. 20:25–36) that give Moses the strength to speak out in front of Pharaoh. Moses is thus a prefiguration of the Prophet himself who also was granted an intimate encounter with God. Muhammad experienced a vision – according to one interpretation – of God Himself seated on His throne (Q. 53:6–7). Like Moses', the Prophet's experience was staged in a particularly exalted, though enigmatic, place (Q. 53:15). Like Moses, Muhammad experienced a widening of the breast (Q. 94:1) during the early phase of his prophetic activity.

Later portrayals of Moses complement his fate before his divine call to prophethood without embellishing his ambivalent personality: while still in Egypt, he unintentionally killed a person, and is thus obliged to hide. It is on his way back from his refuge in Midian that he receives the divine call. The emphasis remains on his debates with Pharaoh, whom he is unable to convince, and who prevails over the messenger. Not unlike other stubborn unbelievers, Pharaoh is punished in this world and will be punished in the next. As in previous retaliation legends the believers are saved, in this case with a miraculous passage through the sea. The exodus, which typologically resembles the *hijra*, is, however, not explicitly compared to that latter event. Moreover, the exodus serves as a prototype for the Prophet's and the Meccan believers' spiritual exodus (Q. 17:1) out of their local situation of distress: that

is, by imagining the Holy Land and positioning themselves towards Jerusalem during prayer. Moses' role as a leader and lawgiver is often evoked, but rarely presented. His trial of the culprits of the blasphemous veneration of the golden calf (Q. 2:51–4; Q. 20:87–8) is the only example of his practising the ethical injunction of *bidding to honour and forbidding dishonour* (*al-amr bi'l-maʿrūf wa'l-nahy ʿani'l-munkar*, Q. 3:110).

Apart from serving as a prototype of the Prophet, traces of Moses' influence are to be found in Islamic ritual. His receiving of the tablets containing the law on Mount Sinai became significant for the Islamic festal calendar, since Ramadan's prototype is the Mosaic Day of Atonement. In the Medinan *Sūrat al-Baqara*, the sura that contains the promulgation of the fast of Ramadan (Q. 2:187–90), one of the main themes carries the motifs of the Moses story connected with the Day of Atonement. According to Goitein, 'Moses' stay on Mount Sinai, the sin of the golden calf, God's forgiveness and bestowal of the book . . . are repeated in sura 2 with much emphasis.'[66] There is also a hint as to the time of the implementation of the Mosaic rule of fasting: the reference to the bestowal of the revelation together with that of *al-furqān* (literally decision, but also redemption, salvation) in Q. 2:185: *clear signs of the Guidance and the Salvation* (*bayyinātin mina'l-hudā wa'l-furqāni*; see also Q. 44:1–4) recalls the text commemorating the battle of Badr in Q. 8:41: *We sent down upon Our servant on the day of salvation, the day the two hosts encountered* (*wa-mā anzalnā ʿalā ʿabdinā yawma'l-furqāni yawma'ltaqā'l-jamʿān*). In this latter context, *furqān* connotes a decisive, liberating victory over threatening enemies. As Kees Wagtendonk has concluded,[67] it is both experiences – the decisive military victory of the Medinan community and the bestowal of the scripture upon them – that gave rise to the institution of the month of fasting in Islam. This is very much in accordance with the case of Moses (Q. 2:53: *And when We gave to Moses the Scripture and the Salvation, wa-idh ātaynā Mūsā'l-kitāba wa'l-furqāna*), the central figure of the founding legend of Jewish fasting on the Day of Atonement, who likewise brought his people a twofold blessing, political liberation and divine revelation.

Can the Qur'an be studied as literature in much the same way that the Bible has been studied as literature since the 1970s in Anglo-American scholarship? As the attempts, here, to read Qur'anic narratives as literary texts have shown, the answer cannot be unambiguously positive. The short suras of the early period may appear promising as objects of a purely literary reading, but among the longer suras of the later period, the same can only be said for *Sūrat Yūsuf* – a text which is almost completely filled with narrative and which displays a sophisticated composition. The Qur'an as a whole has been admired in Arab literary circles through the ages. However, to a reader accustomed to the style

of Western belles-lettres, the Qur'an might not immediately appear as a 'work of great literary force and authority',[68] as the first books of the Bible may do, but presents itself primarily as an instructive work charged with an epistemic task: to rethink and often rectify what had been narrated before. There is thus an epistemic dimension to the Qur'an which often provides the hymnal or narrative texts with a dialectic layer of argument. In the Qur'an, which is no longer a text of the ancient Orient but a text of Late Antiquity, the literary development cognizable in the later books of the Bible reaches its climax, thus creating a completely novel polyphonic, multilayered and highly referential text which seems to rely less on narrative strategies than on rhetorical sophistication for its efficiency.

NOTES

1 Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*, p. ix.
2 Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA, 1987); Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego, CA, 1983).
3 Zirker, *Christentum und Islam*.
4 See Gerd Theissen, 'Mythos und Weltrevolution im Urchristentum', in Dietrich Harth and Jan Assmann, eds., *Revolution und Mythos* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), pp. 27–8.
5 Jan Assmann, 'Der zweidimensionale Mensch: Das Fest als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses', in Assmann and Sundermeier, *Das Fest und das Heilige*, pp. 13–30.
6 For the case of pilgrimage, see Wellhausen, *Reste*.
7 For the case of fasting, see Neuwirth, 'Three Religious Feasts'.
8 For the new meaning imposed on the *ḥajj* performance, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 637–46; chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
9 Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*, p. ix.
10 Ibid., pp. 633–52; Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, pp. 97–160; chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
11 Neuwirth, 'Zur Struktur der *Yūsuf*-Sure'; Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Joseph et Muhammad: Le chapitre 12 du Coran* (Aix-en-Provence, 1989); Witztum, 'The Syriac Milieu'.
12 See chapter 10, 'Narrative'.
13 Rudi Paret, 'Das Geschichtsbild Mohammeds', *Welt als Geschichte* 11 (1951), pp. 214–24.
14 Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*.
15 Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*, p. 10.
16 Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 184.
17 See Neuwirth, *Studien*. The function of the *clausulas* has been demonstrated in eadem, 'Zur Struktur der *Yūsuf*-Sure'; see also chapter 1, '*Neither of the East nor of the West*'.
18 See Neuwirth, 'Qur'an and History'; chapter 10, 'Narrative'.
19 Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 8.
20 Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*, p. 3.
21 Cragg, *Event of the Qur'ān*, p. 158.
22 Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*, p. 10.
23 Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, p. 8.
24 See chapter 10, 'Narrative'.
25 Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, p. 7.
26 Cragg, *Event of the Qur'ān*, p. 171.
27 Heribert Busse, 'Herrschertypen im Koran', in Ulrich Haarmann and Peter Bachmann, eds. *Die Islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Beirut, 1979), pp. 56–80.

28 Cragg, *Event of the Qur'ān*, pp. 171–2.
29 For more on this, see Gerhard Böwering, 'Chronology and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 316–35.
30 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 607–12.
31 For the development of the figure of Noah in the Qur'an, see ibid., pp. 623–33.
32 Aziz al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldun in Modern Scholarship: A Study in Orientalism* (London, 1981).
33 However, nowhere in the Qur'an does David acquire messianic dimensions.
34 Cf. 1 Kings 10:1–13. For the Qur'anic Solomon, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 383–404; Anthony H. Johns, 'Solomon and the Queen of Sheba: Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's Treatment of the Qur'anic Telling of the Story', *Abr-Nahrain* 24 (1986), pp. 76–80; idem, 'Solomon and the Horses: The Theology and Exegesis of a Koranic Story, Sura 38 (Ṣād): 30–33', *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales* 23 (1997), pp. 259–82; and especially Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago, IL, 1993).
35 See Silverstein, 'The Qur'anic Pharaoh'.
36 For the Qur'anic development of Moses, see chapter 10, 'Narrative'.
37 See chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
38 Busse, 'Herrschertypen im Koran', p. 75.
39 Genesis 11:1–9. See Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 116–18; Dirk Hartwig, 'Tower of Babel. Islam', in Hans-Josef Klauck, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and its Reception*, vol. III (Berlin, 2011), pp. 246–7.
40 The perception that a destruction of earlier civilisations has occurred is mirrored, though in different form, in ancient Arabic poetry as well. Here, the persona of the poet has appropriated the collective loss as his own personal bereavement, talking not of settlements gone to rack and ruin but rather of deserted encampments whose relinquishment and erosion he laments as his personal loss; chapter 3, 'Glimpses'; see also Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*; Al-Kindy, *Le voyageur sans Orient*;.
41 Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*.
42 See Böwering, 'Chronology and the Qur'ān', p. 319.
43 These stories (*al-umam al-khāliya*) belong, rather, to the cycle of Biblical stories situated in the Holy Land or its surroundings, a cycle which at a later stage of the Qur'anic development becomes dissociated from the punishment stories.
44 For a reconstruction of the pre-Islamic myth wrought about the ancient people of Thamūd, see Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*.
45 See chapter 7, 'Referentiality', and Angelika Neuwirth, 'Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'ānic Creation Accounts [Part I]', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000), pp. 25–41; [Part II], vol. 2, no. 2 (2000), pp. 1–18.
46 See the discussion of Q. 78:1–6 in chapter 3, 'Glimpses'.
47 Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*; Khalil Shaikh, *Der Teufel in der modernen arabischen Literatur: Die Rezeption eines europäischen Motivs in der arabischen Belletristik, Dramatik und Poesie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1986). See also Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblis*.
48 See chapter 8, 'Sacred Mosque'.
49 Neuwirth, 'The Spiritual Meaning of Jerusalem in Islam'.
50 See chapter 9, 'Discovery of Evil'.
51 See Hosn Abboud, *al-Sayyida Maryam fi'l-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 2010).
52 See chapter 12, 'Imagining Mary'.
53 See chapter 13, 'Mary and Jesus'.
54 Susan Sered, 'Rachel, Mary, and Fatima', *Cultural Anthropology* 6 (1991), p. 136.
55 Margaret Elaine Combs Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice* (New York, 1989), p. 61.

56 Horovitz, 'Das koranische Paradies'; see also chapter 3, 'Glimpses'.
57 Rippin, 'Commerce', p. 134.
58 Combs Schilling, *Sacred Performances*, p. 95.
59 Ibid., pp. 91–2.
60 For Abraham's Qur'anic development, cf. chapter 2, 'Genealogy', and see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 121–86, and see Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, pp. 97–160; see also Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 633–52.
61 For Abraham's sacrifice, see chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
62 Combs Schilling, *Sacred Performances*, pp. 57–8.
63 Witztum ('Foundations') first noted the significance of this re-enactment.
64 See chapter 2, 'Genealogy'.
65 For Moses' Qur'anic development, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, pp. 653–71; chapter 10, 'Narrative'; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, pp. 225–365.
66 See Shelomo Dov Goitein, 'Zur Entstehung des Ramadans', *Der Islam* 18 (1929), p. 190.
67 Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran*.
68 See Alter and Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, p. 2.

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